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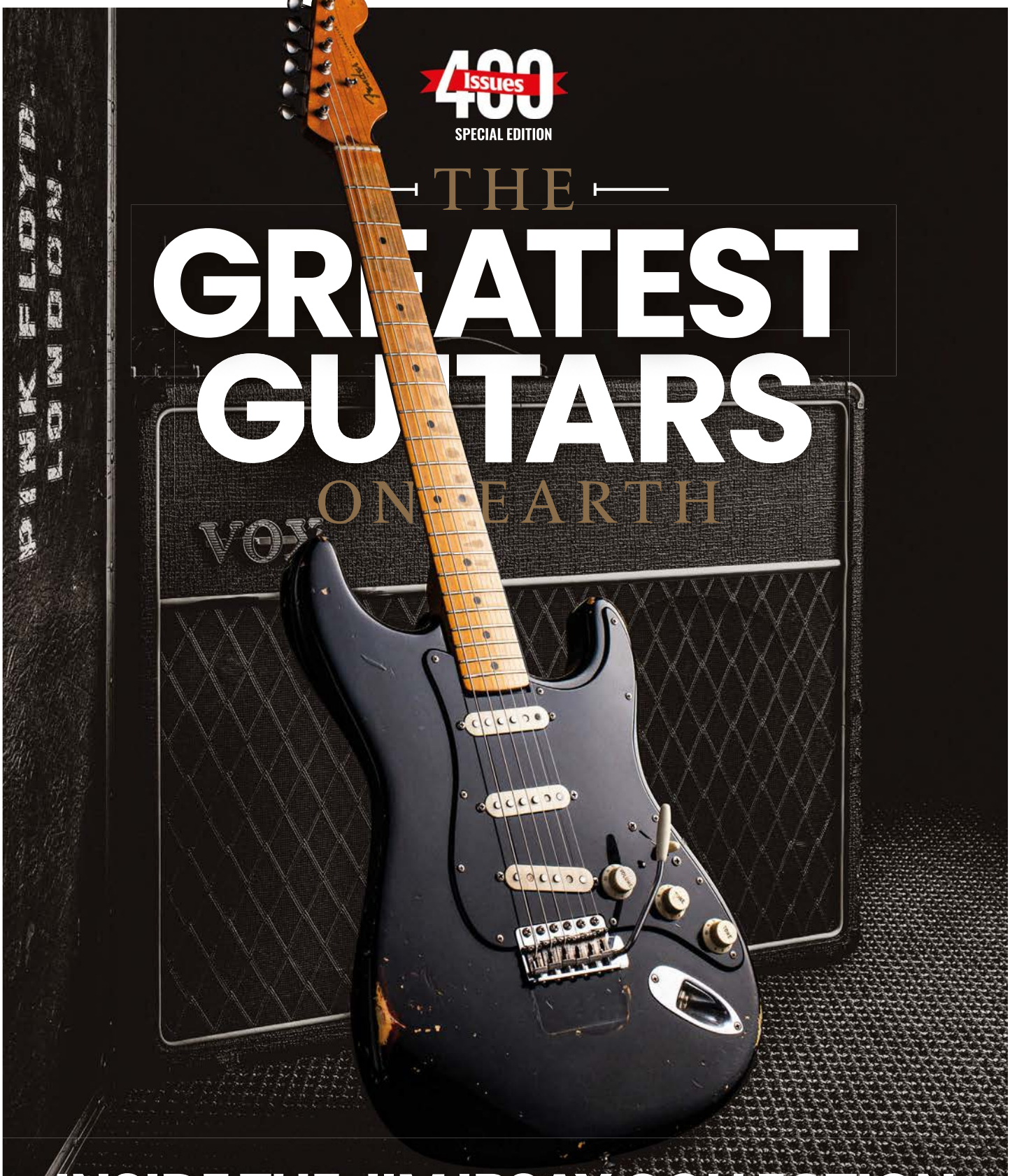

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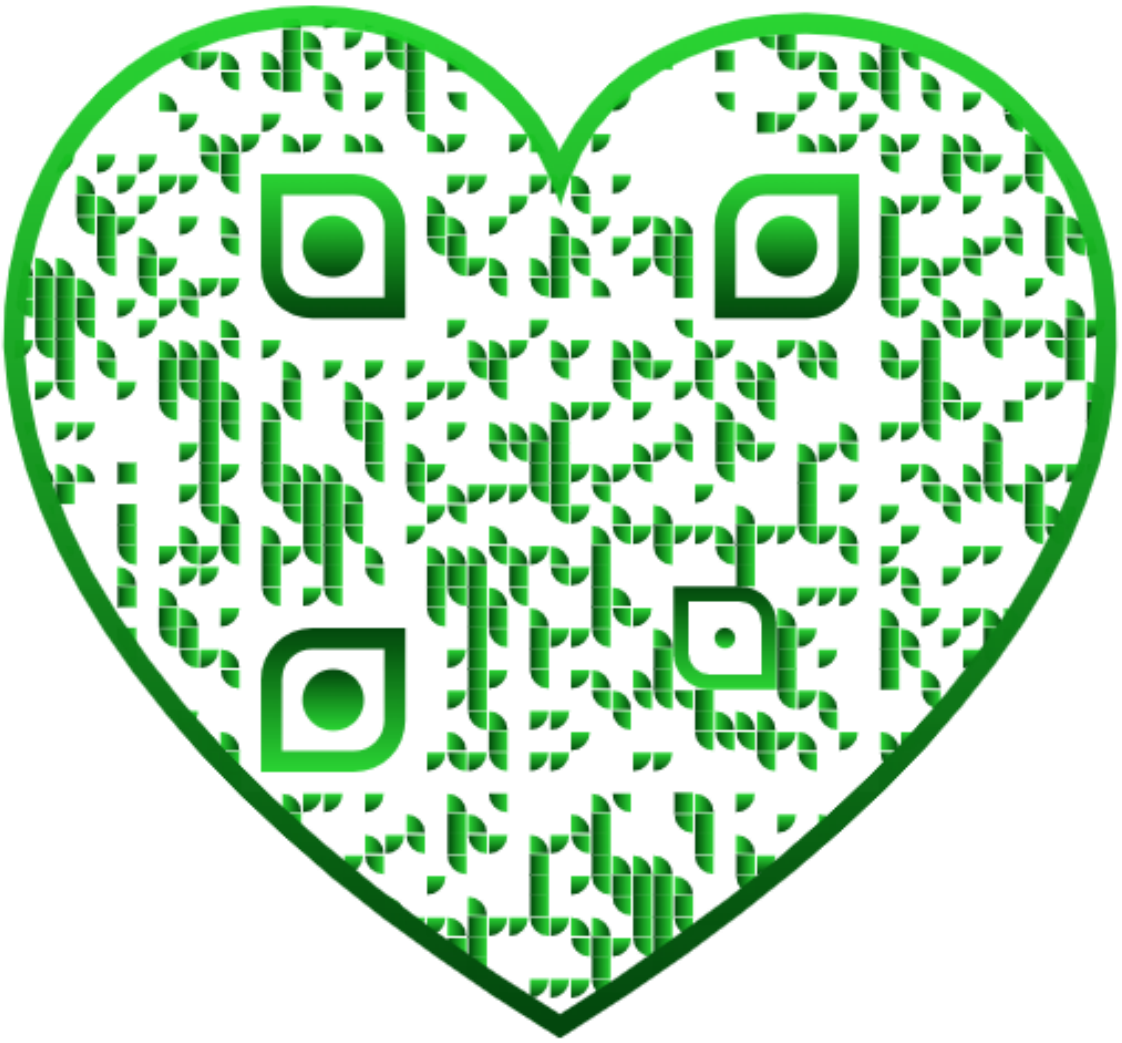

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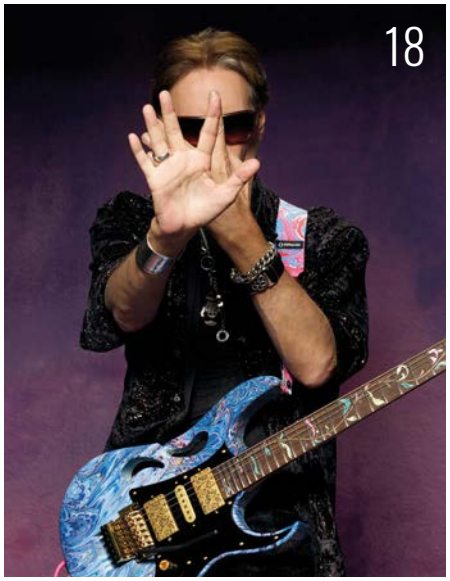
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BandLab UK Limited
Griffin House, 135 High Street
Crawley, West Sussex
RH10 1DQ, United Kingdom

EDITORIAL

CHIEF EDITOR Chris Vinnicombe
MANAGING EDITOR Josh Gardner
ART EDITOR Philip Millard
PRODUCTION EDITOR Sean McGeady
ASSOCIATE EDITOR Sam Roberts
INSTRUMENT PHOTOGRAPHY Eleanor Jane
CONTRIBUTORS Chris Fantana, Rod Fogg, Dave Hunter, Huw Price, Richard Purvis, Josh Scott, Michael Watts, Catherine Woods
HAVE A STORY? Email us at editors@guitar.com

SALES

MANAGER, COMMERCIAL & PARTNERSHIPS Joe Supple
joe.supple@guitar.com

PRODUCTION & OPERATIONS

PUBLISHING PRODUCTION MANAGER Craig Broadbridge
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NME NETWORKS

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER Meng Ru Kuok
CHIEF OPERATING & COMMERCIAL OFFICER Holly Bishop
AVP, NORTH AMERICA LEAD, COMMERCIAL & PARTNERSHIPS Jesse Smith
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR Iliyas Ong
ART DIRECTOR Simon Freeborough
PRODUCT MANAGER Sofiana Ramli
REGIONAL EDITOR (APAC) Karen Gwee
SENIOR MANAGER, OPERATIONS & EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT Amy Fletcher
CONTENT PRODUCTION ASSOCIATE Billy Chua

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EDITOR'S LETTER

BRAVE NEW WORLD

Welcome to the 400th and final print edition of *Guitar Magazine*. On its launch back in 1991, with the tagline "Bringing the guitar into the nineties" and Johnny Marr as the cover-star, this title represented a genuine alternative to the other voices in guitar journalism. In recent years we've worked hard to recapture that spirit and produce a magazine which, in addition to being filled with expert words and beautiful images, is as inclusive and richly diverse as the global guitar community it celebrates.

Although writing the final editor's letter for this title is tinged with sadness, I hope you'll join us for the ride at *Guitar.com* where you'll find all of the great content that you love reading every month and so much more besides, as we divert our energy and resources into making our digital platform the number-one destination for guitarists of every level.

Since taking over as editor in 2015, there have been far too many memorable moments to list here and I've been lucky enough to work alongside some incredibly talented people and meet some of the world's leading guitarists and guitar makers. But putting together this month's cover story will be hard to top. Encountering instruments owned and played by the likes of Bob Dylan, John Lennon and George Harrison is something I'll be processing for a long time to come, but you can read all about it on p64 as we get up close with the greatest guitar collection on earth.

On behalf of the *Guitar Magazine* team, I'd like to thank each and every one of you for supporting us in print over the years. This isn't the end, it's the start of an exciting new era. Have a wonderful holiday season and a happy new year – I'll see you over at *Guitar.com*.

Chris Vinnicombe
Chief Editor, Guitar.com & Guitar Magazine
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Guitar CONTRIBUTORS

From small amps to global guitar adventures, for our final print issue, we're celebrating the *Guitar Magazine* legacy by asking our full-time team and a few longtime contributors about their memorable moments

JOSH GARDNER

CHATTY MAN

Managing editor Josh has been chatting to the great and good of guitar since he joined the brand in 2017. "They say never meet your heroes," he reflects. "But this job has shown me that no matter how famous you are, guitarists love talking about guitar. Whether it's St Vincent or Slash, Jason Isbell or Steve Vai, it's the common ground that unites us all. It's been my great privilege to nerd out with so many guitar icons over the last few years, and to share those stories with you. I can't wait to tell even more of them on Guitar.com."

ELEANOR JANE

PICTURE MAKER

10 years ago, Eleanor was photographing bands for music mags when she was asked to shoot Rory Gallagher's Stratocaster for *Guitar World*. Of course, she took the job – and has since shot stars and guitars around the world. "I've been on many adventures," she says, "from working at Aerosmith's Las Vegas residency to exploring the historic Martin factory archives on a snowy day in Nazareth, Pennsylvania and, of course, getting acquainted with the most exciting vintage collections in the world." See her work in this issue, well, everywhere.

SEAN MCGEADY

MAD MAN

Having served as *Guitar*'s production editor for almost two years, SG enthusiast Sean sneaked himself into print right at the death. Having smashed together his passion for cinema and guitar, he's thrilled to finally be debuting his new series, Guitar On Film, with the story of the flame-spitting guitar/bass from *Mad Max: Fury Road*. "In terms of sheer creativity and forward momentum, *Fury Road* remains unmatched," he says. "To be able to shine a light on the unsung heroes who put its insane guitar together was a joy." Speed to p52 to read about it.

HUW PRICE

POWER RANGER

Guitar tech and former studio engineer Huw has been writing for *Guitar* for more than 20 years. You can find his final print contribution on p121. One of Huw's most memorable past features dates right back to the early days. "Back in 2001, I wrote an article explaining why low-power amps were the best choice for recording," he says. "When Charlie Chandler chased me down outside Chandler's to thank me for writing it and say it was about time somebody did, I dared to believe I might have a future in guitar journalism." He certainly did.

SAM ROBERTS

ANCHOR MAN

Associate editor Sam came on board in 2016, and ever since, he's been our video main man from LA to London, as well as keeping his ear to the ground hunting down the best new bands and gear brands each month. "The highlight of my time on the mag has to be speaking with Paul Rodgers about being reunited with Paul Kossoff's '59 Les Paul, and the spirit of Koss himself," Sam recalls. "Rodgers was almost certain it was the guitar played on *All Right Now*. A true gent and a great story – it doesn't get cooler than that."

GARY WALKER

NATIONAL TREASURE

Former *Guitar* managing ed Gary has reviewed and interviewed countless big-name albums and artists over the years. You can find a host of his recent reviews on *Guitar.com*. "It's so difficult to choose my favourite piece of writing for this fine magazine," he says. "Other than a reverb pedal group test that sent me so far down the rabbit hole I feared I'd never emerge, I'd say interviewing The National. Aaron and Bryce Dessner were a pleasure, and I didn't find transcribing a phone interview with identical twins stressful at all…"

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FRETBUZZ

Your letters and observations on the world of guitar

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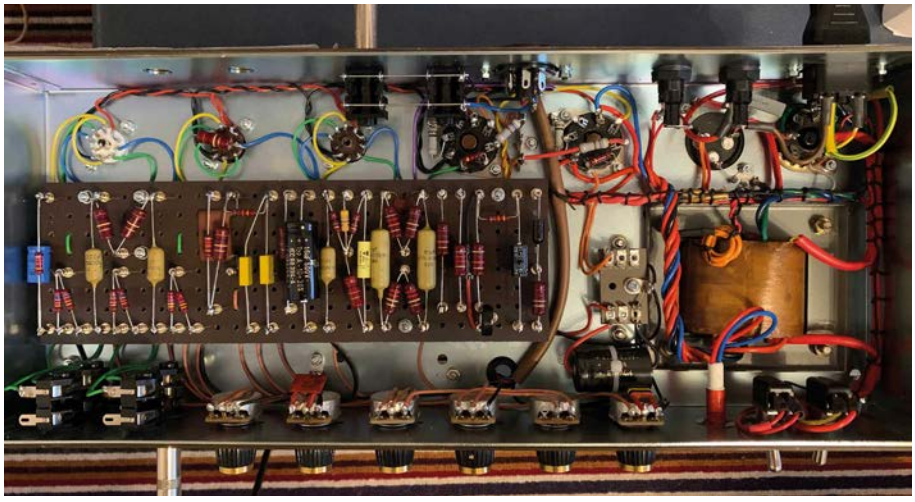
Can you dig it: Steve's DIY jerry can guitar and amp



Home brew: Terry's JTM45 clone has been a labour of love

CAN YOU DIG IT

Hi, over the past few months you've been asking for examples of home-build guitars. I thought I'd send in mine, as they are certainly a little different to what others have submitted so far: jerry can guitars and matching amps!

Both the guitar and amp are built without opening the jerry cans themselves, other than the cut-outs to install the neck and the pickup. So far I've built two matching pairs of jerry can guitars and amps: one green, and one red, with the amps being made by modifying a kit that I bought from The Jam Jar Amps in Wales.

In addition to my two completed pairs, I've also built a third amp, which contains both a 0.25W and a 1.25W amp in it. No matching guitar for that one yet though. Maybe next year!

The guitars are all very playable and the amps sound as good as *can* be expected given the simple innards. Sorry about the pun – didn't see that coming.

STEVE CORY, VIA EMAIL

MARSHALL MATTERS

Dear *GM*, I've really been enjoying Josh Scott's column on the birth of the fuzz in recent issues – I still clearly remember in 1965 the *Satisfaction* guitar riff blasting out the ol' valve radio in my bedroom when I was six. Little did I know that 10 years later, I'd be at Roost amplifiers building guitar amps!

When I semi-retired from Rega hi-fi a good while ago, I told myself that I was going to build a few JTM45 clones to keep myself busy and, as you've been asking for lockdown builds, I thought I'd share that I've finally completed my first one. In the end, I didn't go for a straight-up clone, instead opting for an 18-watt mash-up of a JTM45, a Bassman 5F6-A and a Tremolux 5G9/6V6, all in one! At it's heart, it's a JTM45 using 5F6 circuit values with a 5G9/6V6 output stage. I kept with the 12AY7 as the first valve and also kept with 5F6 values as I've always liked the original circuit values.

It uses a Modulus Amps JTM45 kit, chassis, tag panel and hardware. The mains and output transformers are Radiospares '6.3V' 300V mains and EL84 output as used in the early Marshall 18-watt amps, the choke is an early 1960s Gilson 10H. The resistors are mainly Radiospares NOS film resistors, and the capacitors Mullard polyester (C296) caps, finally the reservoir and smoothing duties are performed by F&T. The rectifier is a Mullard GZ34 and the 6V6 output valves are Sylvania. All the old stock and salvaged parts were gathered from 30 years of going to audio and radio rallies, jumbles, and fairs.

I'm getting 18 watts at clip and it sounds gorgeous with my latest toy, a Ricky 4001 bass. I'm getting that nice Ricky growl at manageable volumes. However, 18 watts of 'proper' 6V6 power is still darn loud!

TERRY BATEMAN, VIA EMAIL

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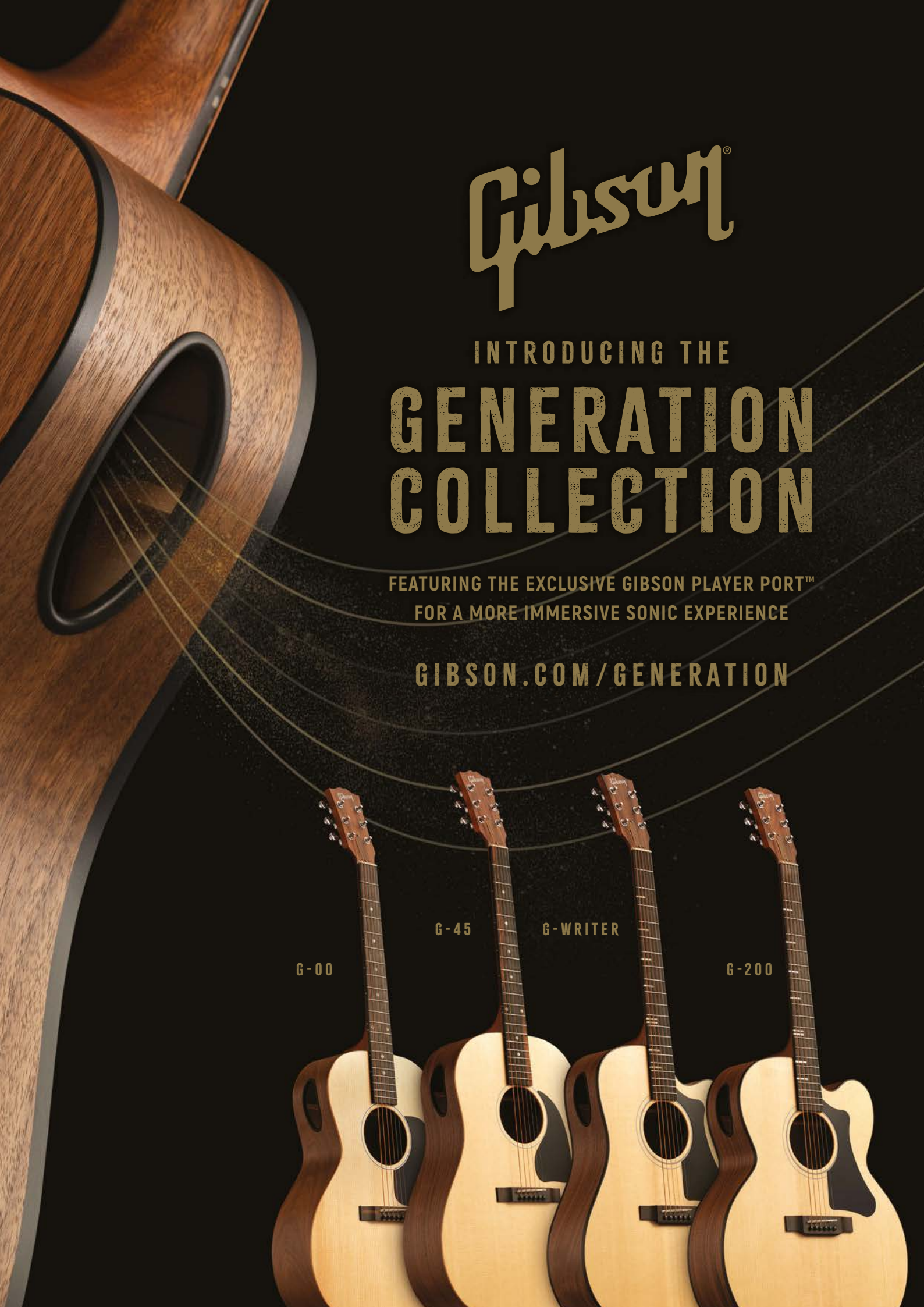


ONES TO WATCH

TASHA

WORDS SAM ROBERTS

The Chicago poet and songwriter on the importance of a good producer, the first guitar she fell in love with and always serving the melody

"When I made *Alone At Last*, I had only been writing songs for two years. I hardly even knew what kind of songwriter I was," says Tasha of her 2018 debut album. Her reservations aside, what's clear on her latest, *Tell Me What You Miss The Most*, is how much her craft has developed since then, revealing her tender approach to melody and chordal work.

There may be twists and turns between the euphoric highs of a new relationship and the sombre lows of an impending break-up but overall this LP is bursting at the seams with joy and acceptance, thanks in part to Tasha's beautiful vocal delivery.

Both a musician and poet, Tasha says that her lyricism was "born from this desire to get back to an intimacy, or honesty, with myself". Here, her words are elevated by her guitar work, which is complex and unpretentious all at once. She admits to working on and developing new tunings and chord shapes, all for the benefit of her songwriting. "I felt inspired to find a way to bring weight, beauty and dynamics to my songs," – all of which are pronounced throughout the LP.

***Tell Me What You Miss The Most* has seen you develop as a musician and a songwriter. How is your growth as a musician reflected on this album?**

"I spent more time playing acoustic while writing this album, which inspired me and brought out new skills and sounds I hadn't previously explored. I also very intentionally tried to find new chord shapes, tunings or plucking styles I had never played before,

© Tim Mosenfelder / Getty Images

"I LOVE ARTISTS LIKE JULIA JACKLIN AND ANGEL OLSEN, WHO ARE ABLE TO CREATE INTERESTING, MAGICAL SONGS USING JUST A FEW CHORDS"

to create songs that felt explicitly 'new' and interesting to me. This drew out a more curious, more earnest, more lyrical style of songwriting that, to me, exemplifies growth.

"This was also my first time having so much control on the production side of things, which was very new territory for me. Production and recording are still very new to me and it was exciting to watch myself grow and discover new skills. Eric Littmann, my friend and producer, was so gentle and attentive throughout the recording process. He made us feel like partners the entire time. I learnt so much from him."

Your body of work reflects your cross-genre approach. Is that intentional or just a result of your influences?

"I don't see this album as crossing genres necessarily, mostly because the idea of 'genre' is never on my mind while I write and create. In other words, genre isn't a factor in the way I identify as a musician. So that must just come naturally.'

When did you write the album? Was it tough to write such uplifting music during the pandemic?

"This album was written pre-pandemic, in October and November 2019, and January and February 2020, with the exception of *Burton Island*, which was written in September 2020 and was not at all hard to write."

What song stands out most on *Tell Me What You Miss The Most*?

"I think *Burton Island* really stands out for its delicate, sparse arrangement. It was the last song I brought to Eric for the record, and he knew immediately that it would sound best with just guitar and vocals. I recorded a double vocal of the melody, and we left it as raw as possible after that. I love how light and airy this one turned out."

Your guitar work is intricate but unobtrusive on this record. Was that a conscious decision?

"In a way, yes. I find a lot of satisfaction and pride when I make a guitar part that feels complicated or hard for me to play. But I also write guitar parts that are always in service to a dynamic vocal melody."

How has your guitar playing changed as you've progressed as a songwriter, and what influence has that had on your songs?

"I love artists like Julia Jacklin and Angel Olsen, who are able to create full, interesting, magical songs using just a few chords so masterfully. In that way, while writing this record, I felt inspired to find a way to bring weight, beauty and dynamics to my songs using, at times, more simple guitar changes."

You're predominantly a Fender player but did any other guitars or amplifiers appear on this LP?

"Pretty much the whole album is played on my Fender Telecaster, but my acoustic Taylor GS Mini makes a few appearances as well."

Throughout the album we hear about the joys of falling and being in love. When did you first fall in love with the guitar?

"I've been playing guitar since I was about 15 but I really fell in love with it five years ago when I bought my first electric guitar, an Epiphone ES-339. After that – once I started playing every day, writing songs on it, and performing with it for the first time – the guitar became much more important to me. It turned into a real object of love."

***Tell Me What You Miss The Most* is out now via Father/Daugher Records**

THE PLAYLIST

ALBUM SPOTLIGHT

GOV'T MULE
HEAVY LOAD BLUES

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

Grammy-winning songwriter and guitarist Warren Haynes discusses honouring his favourite players, recording vocals through guitar amps, and spring reverb tanks failing at just the right moments

After an illustrious career that has comprised more than 20 albums and spans almost three decades, how do you continue to reimagine your work as a band? By going back to the beginning. With *Heavy Load Blues*, Warren Haynes and his bandmates deliver their first dedicated blues album, which features original songs, previously unheard covers, and time-tested blues standards that have become incorporated into their live set.

Recorded live onto analogue tape at Power Station New England studios in Connecticut alongside producer Joe Paterno, the album saw Gov't Mule set up a series of small vintage amps, including 50s Gibson and Supro offerings, giving Haynes a combination of three amps for each song. Throughout the record's 13 tracks, the band embellish blues favourites with impromptu midway jams, as on their version of Junior Wells' *Snatch It Back And Hold It*, and add thunderous rock pomp to a sombre, Howlin' Wolf classic.

The album comes in standard and deluxe editions, the latter offering an additional eight songs of extended live versions and covers of Otis Rush, Muddy Waters and more. Here, Haynes discusses his favourite guitar parts from the album.

LOVE IS A MEAN OLD WORLD

"I wrote this with my friends Ray Sisk and Rick Huckaby and thought it would fit perfectly on this album. For the recordings, I set up a bunch of small vintage amps along with my little Alessandro recording amp and I could choose a combination of up to three amps at any moment. On this, I'm playing a Plummer electric resonator guitar tuned to open G through a combination of a 1950s Supro, a 1950s Gibson Vanguard, and the Alessandro, and singing through a 1950s Danelectro Maestro, which we recorded for most of the songs. We cut it live with Danny Louis, our keyboard player, playing a Telecaster through a 1950s Gibson Skylark and overdubbed the piano after the fact, which was one of the few overdubs on the record."

SNATCH IT BACK AND HOLD IT / HOLD IT BACK / SNATCH IT BACK AND HOLD IT

"I've always loved the original version of this, which was recorded in 1965 by Junior Wells with Buddy Guy. But it's only about 2:49 long. We decided to sandwich our own jam in the middle and stretch it out. This recording is the first take and I'm playing Allen Woody's late 60s Gibson SG Custom that I borrowed for the session and replacing the Vanguard with a Skylark for the amp combination. For the vocal sound, I'm alternating back and forth between the normal mic and a 'bullet' mic plugged into a tweed Fender Champ. On the live take, Danny played his Blaze guitar through a Fender Super Reverb and kept it strapped across his back when he switched to organ for the jam section in the middle. The only overdub is the organ during the guitar solo in the main body of the song which was an afterthought."

MAKE IT RAIN

"The recording of this Tom Waits cover comes with an infamous story. I had brought along my 60s Fender spring reverb tank, which I wanted to use for this song – those that have used them know can be extremely finicky. We secured a solid location for it to avoid that terrible sound they make when jolted but didn't count on the radio interference that set it off many times during the keeper take, oddly enough at poignant moments. I'm playing an old 1950s Danelectro guitar."

FEEL LIKE BREAKING UP SOMEBODY'S HOME

"This song was originally recorded by Ann Peebles but has also been covered by Johnny Adams, Etta James and Albert King, all of which definitely influenced our own version, which has evolved out of several years of playing it on stage. Most of the other songs we recorded for *Heavy Load Blues* we have rarely or never played. For this take, I played my 1959 Gibson Les Paul, which has a very unique sound. The version on the deluxe edition is three minutes longer and has a live ending instead of fading out."

I ASKED FOR WATER (SHE GAVE ME GASOLINE)

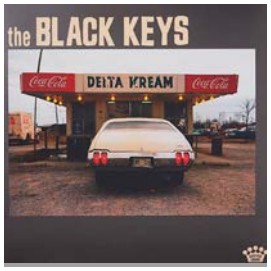
"I'm a huge fan of Howlin' Wolf and, although we have covered some other Wolf songs on stage, we have never done this one. As I've always considered Howlin' Wolf the heaviest of the blues giants and this song to be one of his heaviest tunes. We wanted to give it a little heavier treatment of our own to honour the nastiness of the original version from 1956. This version was the first song we recorded for *Heavy Load Blues* and was the first and only take. It set the tone and raised the bar for the rest of the recording." G

Heavy Load Blues is out now on Fantasy Records

© Jay Sansone

PLAYLIST

For our final Playlist of 2021 we asked our editorial team and contribs to talk us through their favourite albums of an extraordinary year



THE BLACK KEYS

Delta Kream

It's hard to nominate an album of the year when I'm struggling to stop hitting repeat on two beautiful tracks I've heard recently: the sun-dappled *Change* by Big Thief, and Taylor Swift and Phoebe Bridgers' song for the ages *Nothing New*. But I'm here to talk albums – and the standout for me in 2021 was *Delta Kream*. Old-school fans who've wanted Patrick Carney and Dan Auerbach to revisit their OG hill country blues influences are in for a treat, with the duo here aided by RL Burnside and Junior Kimbrough sidemen Kenny Brown and Eric Deaton. Auerbach sits in the pocket as Brown's slide playing takes centre stage, and there's an authenticity in these grooves rarely heard in modern blues.

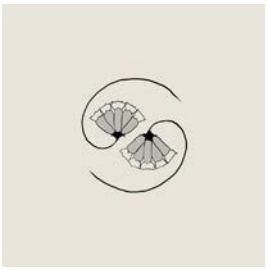
Chris Vinnicombe, chief editor

ARLO PARKS

Collapsed In Sunbeams

With so many records planned for 2020 held back in the hope of normalcy, 2021 has been an astounding year for new music. But no album has stuck with me as much as the debut from Londoner Anaïs Oluwatoyin Estelle Marinho. Standout song *Caroline* has been in my head since its release in February. It's a brilliantly observed song about Parks watching a couple arguing on a bus but the Ed O'Brien-style arpeggiated guitar line lifts it above the typical nu-soul fare. Listening to these clever accompaniments from Parks and producer/guitarist Gianluca Buccellati, it's hard not to draw comparisons to Adrian Utley's seminal work with Portishead. Trip-hop for the TikTok generation? Maybe!

Josh Gardner, managing editor



GODSPEED YOU! BLACK EMPEROR

G_d's Pee At State's End

The band's attempt to "summon a brighter reckoning" in the face of it all, this might be Godspeed's greatest yet. Built from hope rather than pessimism, the record's liner notes read: "This record is about all of us waiting for the end. All current forms of governance are failed. This record is about all of us waiting for the beginning." The idea that we're in the midst of a reckoning underpins much of the music, as dissonant chaos morphs into beauty, with slide guitar melodies working their way up through the cracks between the drones. If Godspeed's 1997 album *F♯, A♯, ∞* sounded like the sun setting on a destroyed city, then *State's End* evokes the sun rising on the same scene.

Cillian Breathnach, staff writer

DRY CLEANING

New Long Leg

Upon the release of their 2019 debut single *Magic of Meghan*, London act Dry Cleaning drew immediate comparisons to post-punk due to their wiry delivery and spoken-word lyricism. But on the exhilarating, aggressive and often humorous *New Long Leg*, the band prove that they're entirely their own entity, pulling the profound from the mundane and offering lessons in the fine art of not taking yourself too seriously. The standout tracks include *Her Hippo*, which features guitarist Tom Dowse's earworm of a riff – part Tony Iommi, part Johnny Marr – and the album closer *Every Day Carry*, with its elongated, delaying modulations acting as a tonic to the droll poetic vocal and rhythm section.

Sam Roberts, associate editor

KIWI JR

Cooler Returns

Arriving hot on the heels of Kiwi Jr's irrepressible, wonky 2020 debut album *Football Money*, *Cooler Returns* found room to try a few new things without giving the impression that anyone was really trying at all. The Toronto band play a smart, funny brand of indie-rock, running jangling hooks and trebly powerchord thrashing up against vocalist Jeremy Gaudet's seemingly endless supply of zingers, in-jokes and observations. Here, Gaudet and guitarist Brian Murphy also paused long enough to try their hand at laidback alt-country on *Only Here For A Haircut*, and hyperactive new-wave on *Highlights of 100*, inhabiting each fresh space with the same shit-eating charm.

Huw Baines, writer

DIVIDE AND DISSOLVE

Gas Lit

What a year. Carcass, Gojira, Jane Weaver, and Monolord were all in contention for me but not even a late release from jam giants Endless Boogie could keep this Melbourne-based two-piece from my top spot. *Gas Lit* is a dense slice of doom-drone designed to rouse and radicalise slumbering spirits, with Takiaya Reed's Telecaster conjuring slabs of sound nailed into place by Sylvie Nehill's primitive percussion. Its core is a powerful piece of spoken-word poetry that captures the pair's mission statement, described on their site as "to secure Black futures; demand Indigenous Sovereignty; and destroy white supremacy." In other words: get in loser, we're going to save the world.

Sean McGeady, production editor

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This spectacular Swiss-made guitar features a unique aluminium core and pickup-swapping design – enter now to win this future-facing insturment

Innovative Swiss boutique luthier Relish does things differently to other makers. Take the Mary One, for example. The core of the guitar is a lightweight machined aluminium frame, onto which its one-piece 24-fret maple neck is bolted. The frame is then covered by a laminate wood body as part of a process that Relish calls a 'floating sandwich', which sees the body fastened by rubber connectors and magnets that leave the aluminium free to vibrate for increased resonance.

A slavish reproduction of a 1950s design this most certainly is not – and the forward-thinking features don't stop there. Removing the Mary One's back reveals Relish's inventive pickup system, which sees each pickup mounted on a magnetic chassis with a four-pin connector. With the Mary One, swapping pickups out is as easy as plugging in a new pedal.

The Relish Mary One is truly one of the most distinctive and pioneering instruments in the world. To be in with a chance of winning it, simply head to *Guitar.com* and answer the question below. We'll even throw in a pair of humbuckers in addition to the mounted P-90s so that you can swap pickups to your heart's content. Good luck!

In which Swiss city is Relish Guitars based?
A) Geneva
B) Lucerne
C) Zürich

Enter at guitar.com/competitions.

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By entering this competition, you agree to the following terms and conditions:

The closing date is **23:59 GMT, 7 January 2022**. The Company's decision is final. This competition is open to the United Kingdom residents only. This competition is open to 18 years old and above only. For full terms and conditions, please go to **bnd.la/gm-ctos**.

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DiMarzio

STEVE VAI

WORDS JOSH GARDNER

PORTRAITS LARRY DIMARZIO

THE *Guitar* INTERVIEW

If there's a pantheon of shred guitarists, Steve Vai remains at its pinnacle. You could argue that nobody has done more to push the boundaries of what guitar is capable of in the past 40 years. But despite his name being a byword for virtuosity, the 61-year-old refuses to rest on his laurels – and insists that he has barely scratched the surface of what this wonderful instrument can do. As he prepares to welcome his 10th studio album, *Inviolate*, we caught up with him to talk surgery, embracing what is, and designing insane triple-necked guitars with Ibanez. Plus we learn how one of the album's solos pushed him so far out of his comfort zone, even he doesn't know if he'll ever be able to top it…

For a man who has seen his best-laid plans for two albums torn apart by forces beyond his control over the past 18 months, Steve Vai remains a remarkably positive and optimistic presence. When the pandemic first put paid to his plan to at last finish the third and final part of his 15-year *Real Illusions* project, the sexagenarian shred icon instead looked at what he could accomplish back at his home studio, and decided to indulge his long-held desire to make an acoustic record. Things were going swimmingly. He had 15 songs written and was working himself up to record a particularly intense strumming section when *snap* – the exertion tore three tendons in his right shoulder. The injury was severe enough to require a surgical repair, putting his picking arm in a sling – and another album on the shelf.

"I try to look at everything that happens as being in my best interest," Vai tells us via Zoom from his home studio. "I didn't know what I was gonna do. But plans change. I didn't always do this. I used to complain and worry quite a bit but, over the years, you just realise that when you figure it out as you go, everything's easy. Because what are you going to do, fight what is?"

Some might take their arm self-destructing as a sign that, after a 40-year career, it was time to take it easy. Nothing could've been further from the truth.

"I had my arm in this sling that was invented by the doctor that did the surgery. His name is Dr Knapp, so it's called the Knappsack," Vai chuckles. "Shortly after the surgery, I received this beautiful Onyx Black PIA [Vai's latest Ibanez signature model]. I'm sitting there thinking, 'Well, I got one hand, what can I do?' Why can't I do a song with one hand? Anybody with a legato technique can figure that out. When I released the song, called *Knappsack*, I was so surprised at the response, it was a stunner. There was an opportunity where lemonade was made out of lemons."

The response to *Knappsack* lit a fire under Vai. The result? *Inviolate*, his first studio album in five years. He calls it a "good-vibe instrumental record" but that might be underselling things. Across its nine tracks, Vai pushes his envelope in ways he never has before.

VISUAL DICTIONARY

Vai's boundary breaking is never more evident than on the track *Candlepower*. Developed during the enforced downtime of the first lockdown, the song led to him developing a new technique, where you bend a note while fretting another but bend only the top joint of the finger to do so, independently from any other. He's christened it "joint-shifting". It's tricky to explain but a remarkable thing to see and hear in action, though Vai isn't basking in his new creation.

"The lockdown gave me a lot of time to fool around with some techniques and things that I had in the back of my head," he says with a shrug.

You might think it extraordinary that someone like Steve Vai can still happen upon ways of approaching the electric guitar that he's never thought of before – and you wouldn't be alone in thinking it. But despite his name being a byword for virtuosity for over 40 years, Vai is quick to challenge that notion.

"I KNOW HOW WEIRD I COME OFF TO SOME PEOPLE. IT USED TO BUG ME. BUT THEN YOU JUST REALISE, 'WHO NEEDS TO BE THE HAPPY ONE HERE?' WHY FIGHT YOURSELF?"

"I've never even scratched the surface of what the potential of that instrument is," he insists. "All of us do that, together, y'know? But it's interesting, because I don't think about, 'What are you going to do next?' I've just been blessed every step of the way.

"What I do is just think, what would I like to do? I have a simple technique for creation that anyone can use. You have to know the fact, first and foremost, that you are a creative person. You don't believe so? You're being misled by your own self. Because you are, that's what you're here for. Being creative is the gift that everybody has – but many people block it because of insecurities or fear of failure or whatever it is. The ability to be creative is infinite – you'll never tap it out. The only thing that can ever obstruct it is your belief that it's not there.

"I know it's there. What I don't know is how it's gonna show itself. But I just say, 'Okay, I would like something fun, something cool'. I always tell myself, 'Okay, now you're going to do something that you never did before'. Because why not? And then inevitably an idea, an inspiration, just comes in one download. So with *Candlepower* it was like, 'You're gonna play a guitar clean, with no whammy bar, with your fingers and you're gonna do this technique – and the whole thing just came! Boom! Okay, I'm gonna do it. Got it!

"And it seems impossible. I'll just sit there at first. You visualise it and it's like, 'What was I thinking?' It almost seems overwhelming. And then you just start, you just do it. And then it's not overwhelming anymore."

GRETSCH APPEAL

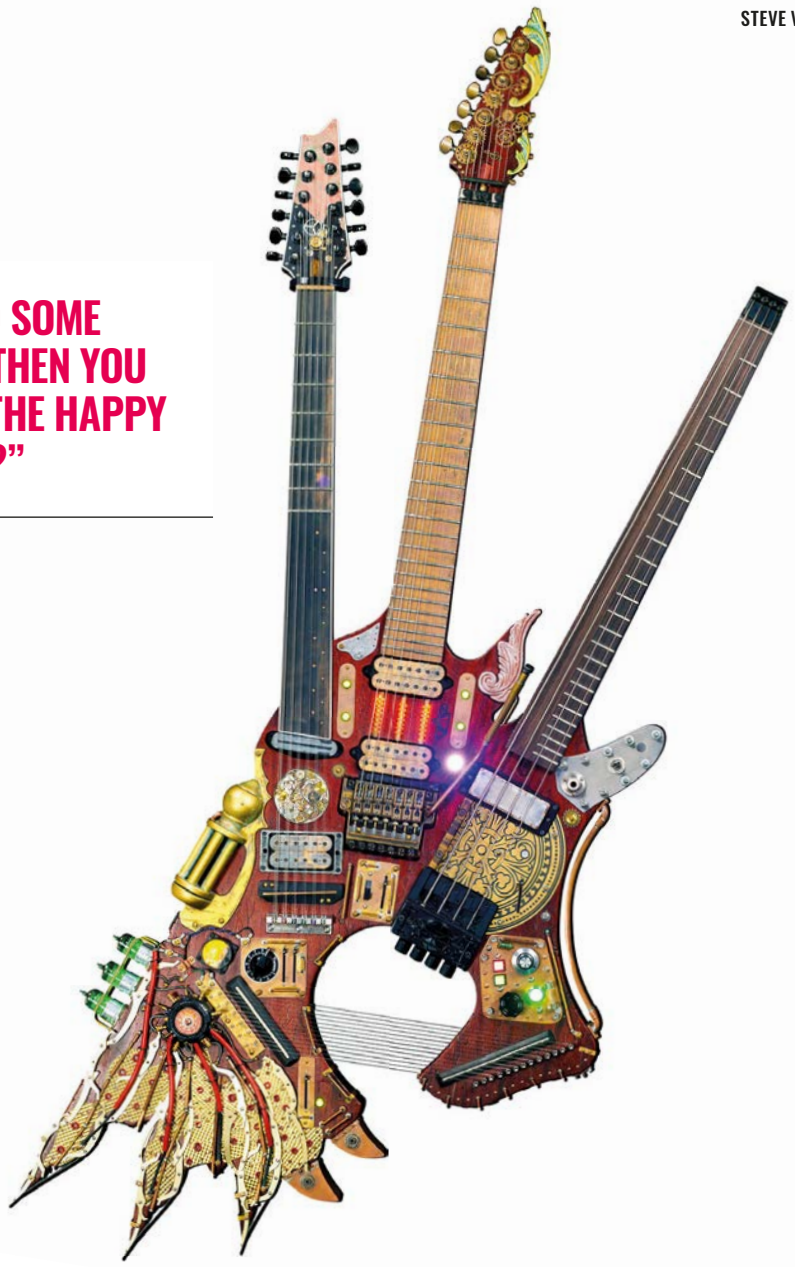
This spirit of diving headfirst into the unknown runs throughout *Inviolate*, and is especially evident on *Little Pretty*. The track sees Steve Vai – yes, *that* Steve Vai – putting down his Ibanez in favour of that most un-shred of instruments: a Gretsch.

"It's just sound of it," Vai says when we ask what on earth he was thinking. "Because a Gretsch like that, nothing sounds like it. The notes have space around them. I had the riff for *Little Pretty* and I realised that I just couldn't just use my humbucker JEMs, because that's just too much. They're too big, it's a different kind of sound.

"I had that guitar and I would walk past it in the studio for like, five years like, 'One day I'm going to play you!' Then when I had the riff for *Little Pretty*, I said, 'Now's the time' and I picked up the guitar. I went to play but then I realised there was no way I was going to be able to do what I was envisioning on that guitar. So I sent it to a friend of mine who knows how to make an unplayable guitar playable. But as playable as that guitar became, it was still outside my comfort zone, especially when I was playing something like *Little Pretty*, where there was no compensating for anything."

A demanding and outside-his-comfort-zone experience it may have been but it was clearly an enormously rewarding one. Even given most artists' tendency to enthuse about their most recent works, Vai's appraisal of *Little Pretty* and its unorthodox approach to chord progression demands attention.

"The solo on *Little Pretty*, that's a monumental achievement for me. That's one of my best ever," he reflects. "I can't touch that, I mean it. When I set out to do that, I said, 'You're gonna write chord changes that are unlike anything you've ever heard. Every chord is going to be different. It's going to reflect a synthetic mode that you've never played, and it's going to go by fast, and you're going to solo over it and you are not going to sound like a jazz-bo fusion-head! You're going to sound like you're creating a motherfucker of a melody over impossible chords… oh, and it's going to sound easy!'"



ABOVE Created by Ibanez over five years, the Hydra is a triple-necked guitar/bass that combines a 12-string, a seven-string and a bass, as well as sympathetic harp strings and much more

OPPOSITE Vai cradling his current Ibanez signature model, the PIA or 'Paradise In Art' is an evolution of the legendary JEM design

"I AM THE CHAMPION OF MY MUSIC, EVERY ARTIST IS – WHY WOULDN'T I BE? DON'T MAKE IT UNLESS IT'S IMPORTANT TO YOU"

Vai's signature Onyx Black PIA inspired the one-hand workout *Knappsack*, released in March 2021

HAIL HYDRA

If easy was in Vai's vocabulary, we probably wouldn't have *Inviolate*'s opening track, *The Teeth Of The Hydra*. This dazzling melodic piece was created to showcase the insane guitar that inspired it, which you can see Vai clutching on the album's cover. The Hydra is a gloriously mad idea: a triple-necked guitar/bass with sympathetic harp strings and a dizzying array of in-built technology all wrapped up in an unabashedly steampunk finish. It looks like something out of a movie – and for good reason.

"The Hydra started when I was watching one of the *Mad Max* movies," Vai says. "There's this thing where they're driving through the desert and there's this guy on the front of a truck with a guitar [flip to p52 to find out more about the *Fury Road* guitar and the people who built it]. And I thought that was so cool. I thought, 'Man, I want a piece of that! I'm doing something like that!'

"The idea was to create an instrument that was kind of unique, where it had three necks: one neck was a 12-string with half of it fretless, a seven-string neck, and then a bass neck with the E and A strings fretless – and then it's got these harp strings on it. And I got with Ibanez and I shared everything and, I gotta tell you, man, these guys, they just blew up the bridge! This was about five years ago when it started. They sent me a rendition of the Hydra that just stunned me, I couldn't believe it. It was more than I expected. And I'm like, 'You… you're gonna build that?! Really?!' We're gonna build it."

Over the next four or five years, Vai would go back and forth with the boffins at Hoshino Gakki in Japan – Moti Kashiuchi, who created the original render, and luthier Kazuya Kuroki and engineer Hirotada Nomura, who brought the instrument to life – honing the design through several prototypes until it was finally ready.

"Maybe a year-and-a-half ago, it shows up in the studio and I couldn't believe it when I saw it," Vai remembers. "It was awesome and intimidating. Because I knew when I had the original idea, when the download came, one of the rules I give myself is it doesn't matter if it's weird or quirky, it has to sound like a piece of music and it has to have melody. If it has no melody, it's just wank. Because it's not a gimmick, this guitar. It's got piezos, and sustainers and sympathetic strings and sample-hold stuff – the technology they put into this instrument is stunning."

So you've spent five years meticulously crafting this insane triple-necked behemoth that you want to employ to create something musically exciting. But before you can do that, you need to answer a simple question: how do you even play the thing?

"Imagine what it would be like to juggle chainsaws," Vai says, with a laugh. "I knew I wanted it to look fascinating, because I'm a performer, you know? I'm a ham. I love theatre and all this stuff. I'm an entertainer. But the Hydra is very heavy, and we didn't really consider that. So we designed this waist strap so that all the weight is on my waist and not on my shoulders. But still, it's heavy, and when you're holding it, it almost feels like you have vertigo – it takes you where it wants you to go. It's laid out in a way that's very playable but you can't stand with it for more than five minutes, and I needed to use it for *six weeks*. So we propped it up, and then I sat there for six weeks.

"The funny thing is, when I first got there and I'm looking at this thing, I'm like, 'How are you going to do this? What were you thinking? You got some balls Vai! Are you really going to do this?' And then there's the fear, you know? Thinking, 'I've got this instrument and it's really cool but people are gonna see and just think it's a novelty, and I had it made because I can, because I'm Steve Vai and I can have anything made'. So I've got to deliver. And I'm sitting there going, 'But how are you going to deliver?!' And inevitably there's always a little voice of fear in the background. But inevitably, there's this other voice that always comes in and says, 'Shut the fuck up. Just do it. You got this.' That little voice is probably at the foundation of everybody's creative impulse when it comes time to eclipse any fear that you have about doing it. So I'm like, 'Yes, sir!'"

THE GREATEST SHOWMAN

Those who remember Vai's 1999 album *The Ultra Zone* will know that the Hydra is far from the first time in his career that he has indulged his flair for the theatrical and the vaguely preposterous. For many of us, that's part of the fun of instrumental guitar, particularly in a live setting. When we ask whether Vai sees such theatricality as part of the job, he's quick to counter.

"I don't see it as a job," he says. "I see it as my particular way of expressing what I like to do. For instance, I was watching this video of Derek Trucks and that guy is a completely inspired player. I loved it. He barely moves at all. He just plays so beautifully and that's the way he does it. I wouldn't speak for him but I assume that there's probably not a big, 'I am an entertainer and need to project to the end of the arena' attitude. It's like: here I am and that's it. And that's great, for him. But I've always had a little different approach, maybe a big different approach!

"I don't know why, it's just something that was in me from the very beginning. And I fought it for many years because I know how peculiar it can look, you know? I know how weird I come off to some people.

It used to bug me to see criticisms and stuff. But then you just realise, 'Who needs to be the happy one here?' Why fight yourself? And this is a great message for any guitarist or anybody that feels as though their creative impulses are not the norm, whatever the fuck that means! I surrendered to myself."

It's strange to hear one of the guitar world's most consistent innovators discuss the insecurities that come with being a trailblazer and following your muse. But it's important to remember quite how different the guitar landscape was when Vai first sprang onto the scene. These days, it's de rigueur for artists to attend Berklee – or any of the other prestigious guitar schools across the world – to hone their craft. But when Vai attended back in the late 1970s?

"I looked for music colleges that had *guitar*," he says. "There weren't any! Berkeley was the only one! When I started going, it was nothing like today. It was the only school that had guitar, and it was jazz, because besides classical music, that was the other acceptable genre. As a matter of fact, I was once coerced by a band member to learn cover songs so that we could actually make some money. So we were rehearsing, playing Kansas and all this progressive rock stuff. But we would have to put a sheet over the window where we were on campus, so that nobody would know who was playing that devil rock 'n' roll!"

HOT FOR TEACHING

While by his own admission Vai spent most of the 90s focusing on building his career as a performer, in recent years he's devoted more and more of his time to sharing his vast knowledge with the next generation, whether that's through his Alien Guitar Secrets clinics, his Truefire course or, most recently via his Patreon page.

"You know, when I was in high school and I was studying music theory, while I had these fantasies of being a rock musician, a part of me felt that I would be very happy as a high-school music teacher," Vai says. "Because my high-school music teacher changed the quality of my life, you know? He gave me such great gifts. And I thought. 'I can do that for others'.

"Now one of my goals is to create some kind of a forum where everything that I've learnt, everything that might be helpful to young players or anybody, I want to put everything there. We looked at various ways of presenting it and in the discussion it was brought to me that Patreon would probably be the best way. It's been working really well and I just keep putting stuff in it. Hopefully, someday, that'll quench my teaching desires!"

For a man in his sixties, Vai is clearly engaged with social media and the modern innovations that have to a large extent democratised music and made it easier to build an audience than ever before. He recognises, though, that they come with their own pitfalls.

"Like anybody else, whenever they come along, they only have the tools that are available to do what they do," he says. "For me, that was things like a cassette recorder, and then a four-track recorder. How do you get it out? There was no way. There was no digital. There were no emails. There was no internet. When my first record came out, *The Attitude Song* was put in *Guitar Player* magazine as a flexi-disc. That was the best we had.

"So you adjust. These days I don't do it like I used to do it. I'm going to use everything that's available to me. That's one of the things that I notice with a lot of young artists that are wondering how to get their music out. Usually they ask, 'How do you do it?' And then they fill in the blank by complaining in their head. Like, 'Why should I do it? What good is it to put your music out when everybody gets it for free? Labels aren't signing my kind of music…'

"There's other ways to look at it. And one of the ways is that technology is your friend – technology is there to help you. Everybody in this business is there for you and you are there for them. You just gotta navigate to the right people. Technology has made it so that I don't have to answer to a label or anything. Nobody is controlling my creative desires except me."

GO YOUR OWN WAY

Whether you first cottoned on to him as Frank Zappa's stunt guitarist, dug his work with David Lee Roth or were mesmerised by 1990's gamechanging *Passion And Warfare* album, Vai has long been synonymous with the peak of what our instrument is capable of, both technically and creatively. As we wrap up our chat, we wonder how he's stayed on the bleeding edge for so long.

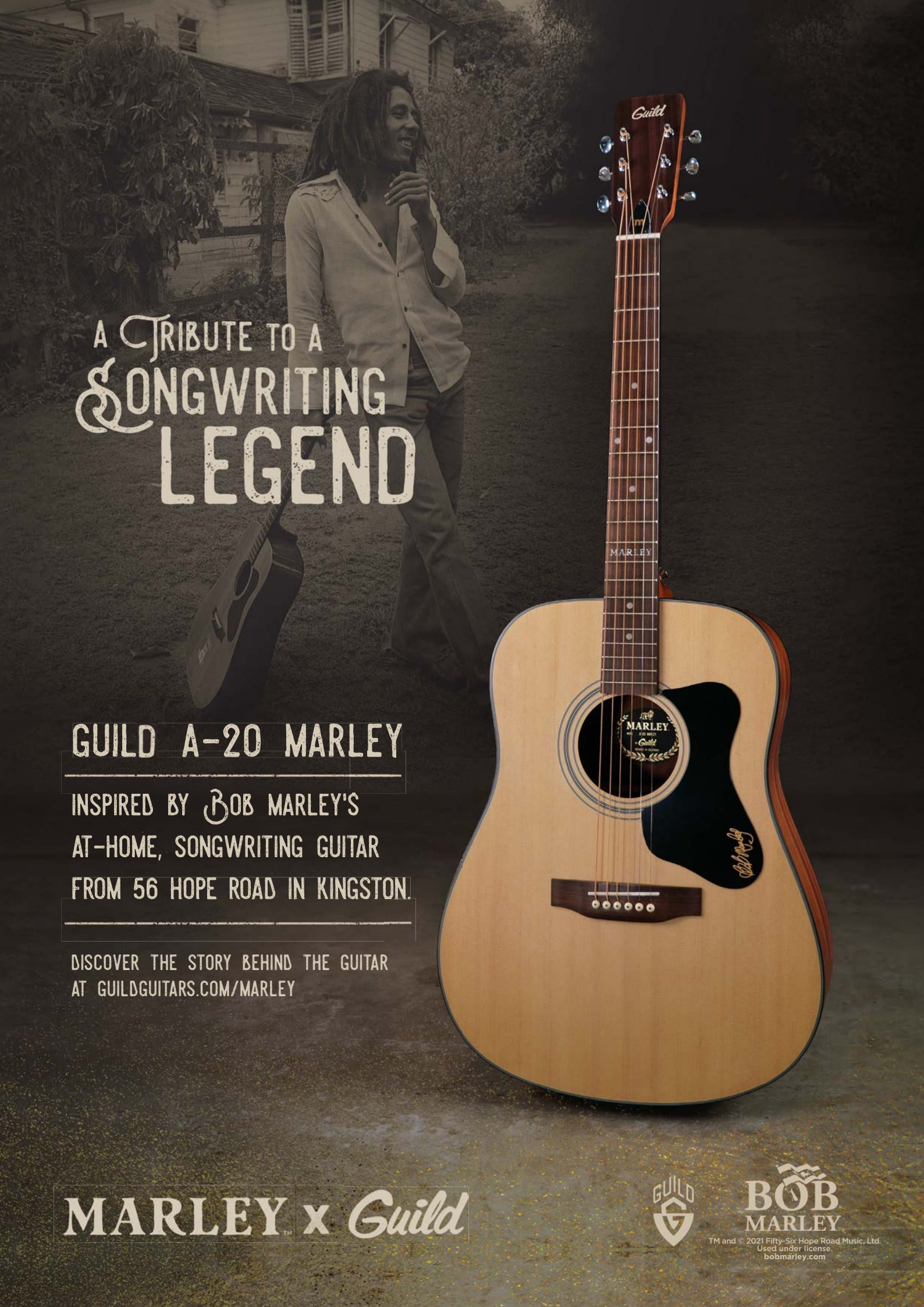
"I've always turned a blind eye to what was supposed to be the most 'successful' course for me in the world, because you don't know what that is," he says. "So when it comes time to create a piece of music, I always try to infuse it with something that really pushes my buttons. Something that says, 'Okay, you've never done this before'. That's what turns me on. I love that, when I have a creative idea for something and then I just do it.

"This is a lesson I've learnt: the moment you decide 'I'm going to do this', the sun, the moon and the stars will work with you. But you have to authentically and sincerely decide, 'I'm going to do this'.

"If it sounds like I'm speaking as though everything I do is great – no! I read this article about a month ago and the guy was talking about this DJ. He said, 'This DJ is like Steve Vai, in that he believes everything he does is much deeper than it is.' I sat and I thought about that, and I thought, 'Yeah, he's right'.

"I am the champion of my music and every artist is the champion of their music – why wouldn't I be? Don't make it unless it's important to you and it's as deep as you can go. And if I'm not as deep as everyone else? I can assure you that I'm doing the very best I can. That's all anyone can do!" **G**

***Inviolate* is out 28 January 2022 via Mascot Label Group**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OUT OF THE BLUES

Curb Your Enthusiasm and *The Goldbergs* star Jeff Garlin is selling some of his favourite guitars to benefit a cancer charity. We pay him a visit in Los Angeles to check out the highlights

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE
PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE

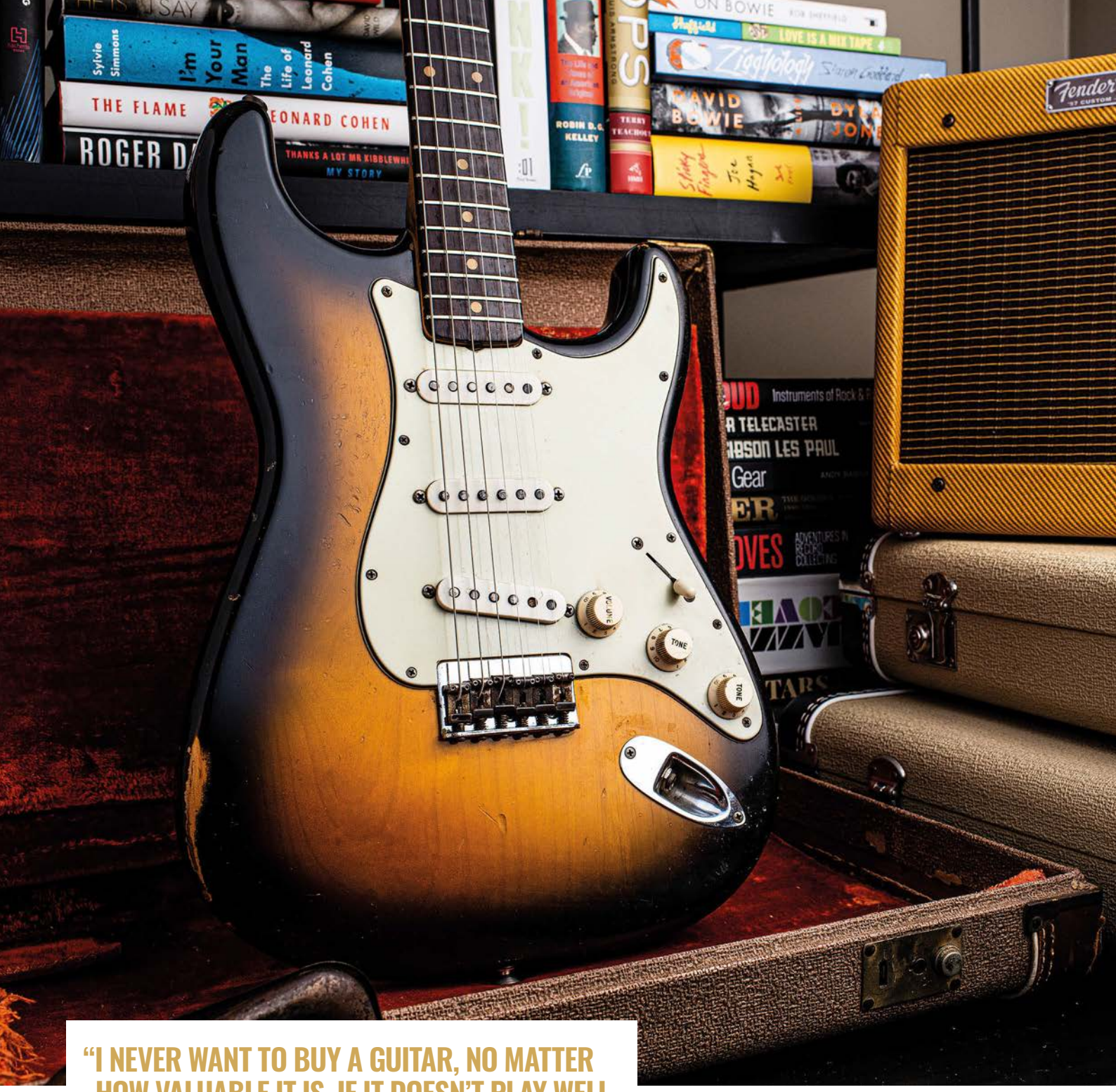
"Tweedy is really fucking funny." We're sat with Jeff Garlin in the living room of his Mullholland Drive home while the award-winning comedy actor and stand-up comedian is considering which of his many musician friends could make it as a professional comic. As well as revealing which other guitarists he finds funny, Garlin insists that Wilco frontman Jeff Tweedy has the chops to make it in the cutthroat world of stand-up.

But first, down to business. In early 2020, *Guitar Magazine* visited Garlin to peruse his impressive collection. Like many of us, he's spent the past year and a half buying, selling and trading gear to stave off the boredom of extended periods of inactivity during lockdown. However, with the assistance of Los Angeles retailer Imperial Vintage [imperialvintageguitars.com], Garlin recently decided to take the more drastic step of listing almost all his guitars for sale on *Reverb.com* – and all for charity.

"Here's the thing," he says. "I love guitars. I love talking about guitars. I'm passionate about guitars. But I have too many guitars! I'm on the board of a wonderful charity, literally called Fuck Cancer [letsfcancer.com]. It's a charity that's about prevention, and when somebody in your family comes down with cancer, we help you get all the right care, the right information. I've helped before. I'm a photographer also and, when I had my first show, the profits all went to Fuck Cancer. And so I thought, 'I have a bunch of guitars, I'm gonna sell most of 'em to help people who are dealing with this'. That's really it. I like doing that stuff. I make more than enough money being a comedian. I'm successful enough."

As noble an endeavour as that is, it still sounds like a wrench. "They are all gut-wrenching, I love them all. But what would I rather have? Something sitting on my wall and getting played occasionally or someone who's in a lot of pain being helped?"

Garlin, who also hosts a show on Gibson TV with Jimmy Vivino, is enthusiastic in his praise of the Nashville company's recent output. But when it comes to vintage guitars, his passion is for a particular era of Telecaster production. "My jam is 1959-64 Fender Telecasters with rosewood 'boards," he says. "But I especially love the slab 'boards. The only reason I go up to '63 and '64 – because they're not slab 'boards – is my love of Mike Bloomfield.



"I NEVER WANT TO BUY A GUITAR, NO MATTER HOW VALUABLE IT IS, IF IT DOESN'T PLAY WELL AND IT'S NOT A GOOD-SOUNDING GUITAR"

ABOVE Garlin says this 1959 hardtail Strat was his way of saying, "I want a Strat... but I really want a Tele!"

OPPOSITE This Custom Shop Mary Kaye Strat was made by John English. "He's considered the greatest Fender Master Builder of all time," says Jeff. "It's one of a limited run from 2005 but what's so cool about it is there's also a certificate in there signed by Mary Kaye herself. A wonderful guitar"

He played that '63 Telecaster with Dylan. He was a Jew from Chicago, which is what I am, so he's a hero of mine. I'd rather go to war with a fucking Telecaster than I would any Gibson guitar. But, man, are Gibson guitars beautiful. I love what they are doing, they are passionate."

As a buyer, Jeff prioritises playability and tone over originality and collectability. "I never want to buy a guitar, no matter how valuable it is, if it doesn't play well and if it's not a good-sounding guitar," he says. "I know some people would love an original '59 Les Paul and generally most of these quote-unquote dentists or whatever, they don't give a shit what it sounds like. It's like, 'I have one, it's all-original'. That's not my thing."

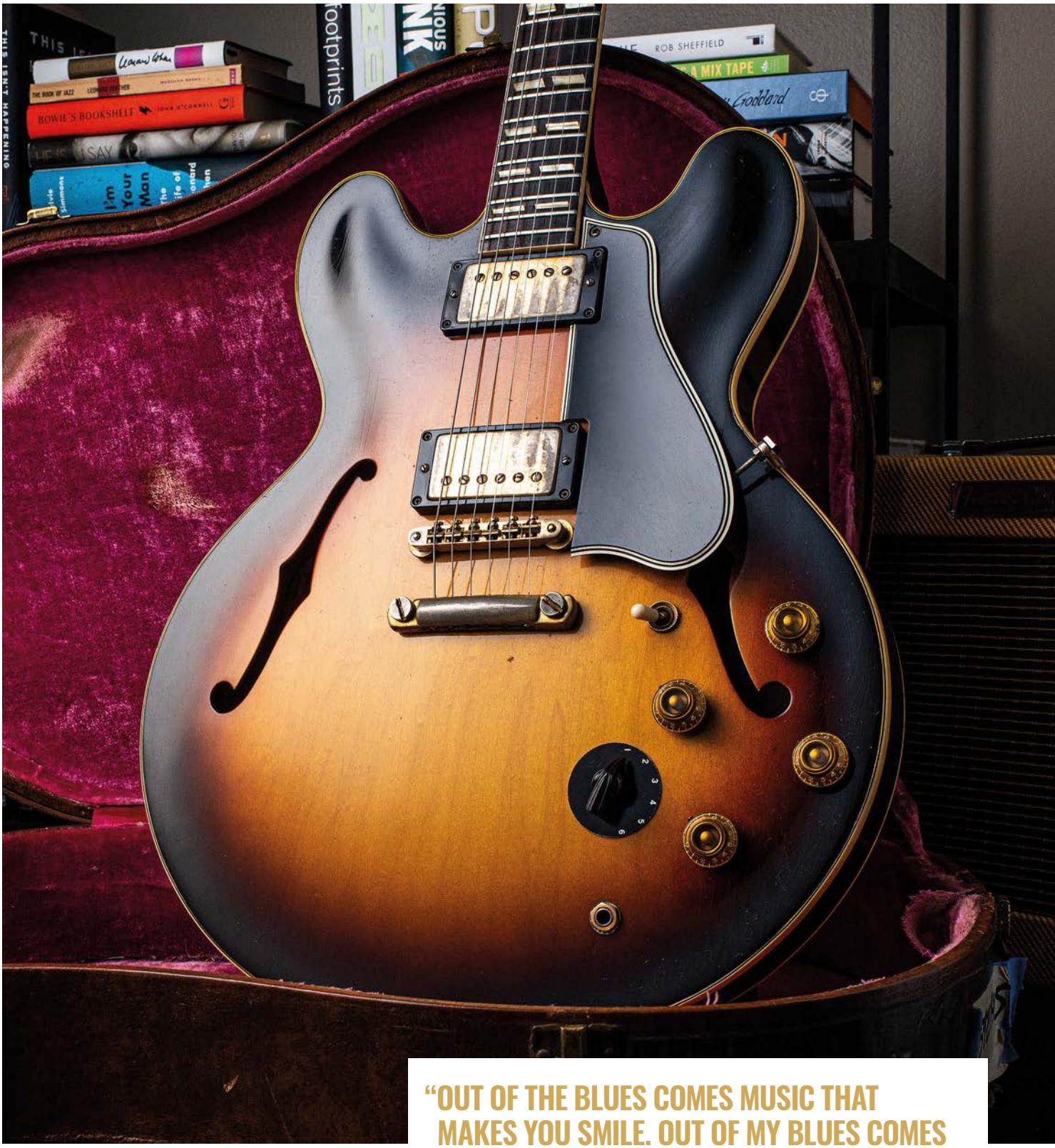
TRAVELLIN' BLUES

Garlin is about to head out on a stand-up tour to benefit US comedy clubs hit hard by last year's lockdowns, waiving his fee at a dozen venues across the country. In June 2022, he travels to Europe for a string of comedy dates that are all set to feature a musical finale.

"When I go on that tour, I'm gonna be bringing my guitar," he says. "I'm making my guitar debut in Europe in June. At the end of my show, without saying anything – even though I'm telling you now – I'm gonna do *Boogie Chillen'* by John Lee Hooker. The guitar and the amp will be out there for the whole show, to the side. But it will never be mentioned. I'll walk off, people are leaving, going, 'What was with the guitar?' and I'll come back out, sit on the stool and I'll play it. I'm gonna do it in a real sincere, bluesy manner that I hope people dig. I'm not doing it for any other reason than I dig it and it's gonna make me happy."

footprints
MONK
POPS
VOLUME
TONE
TONE

This '62 Gibson SG/Les Paul Standard has a slight crack but it has been repaired. "It's a delightful guitar," says Jeff. "It's got PAFs in it. If that's your jam, that's the guitar you want"



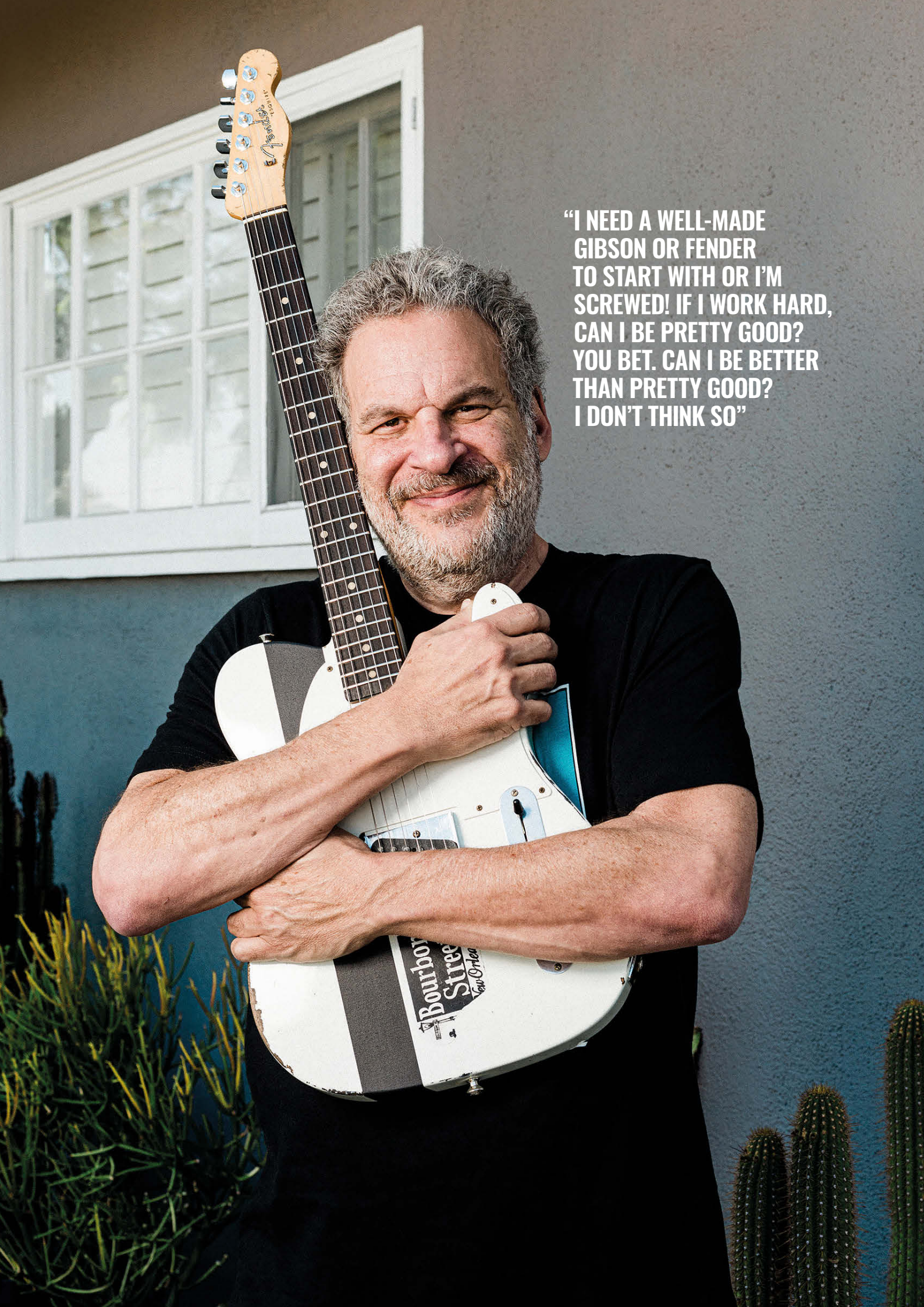
"OUT OF THE BLUES COMES MUSIC THAT MAKES YOU SMILE. OUT OF MY BLUES COMES COMEDY THAT HOPEFULLY MAKES YOU LAUGH"

At a time when the whole world feels like it could benefit from an injection of positivity, Garlin's enthusiasm is infectious. "I think the most ironic name for a show for me is *Curb Your Enthusiasm*. Because I am the most super-enthusiastic guy. My girlfriend is always trying to calm me down. My ex-wife would always try and calm me down. They love me but I'm an enthusiastic fucker, what can I say?"

Garlin is obviously no stranger to the stage but playing guitar in front of an audience brings its own unique dangers. "I will probably be vomiting," he admits. "Because I'm very relaxed – and stand-up? I improvise a lot and I'm so confident. It's not an ego thing. I'm just confident that when I go up on stage I'm gonna do well. Sometimes the audience doesn't think I'm so funny! But I pretty much do well. This? My gut feeling is that I will be pretty nauseous.

"Being scared is not a bad thing by the way. But what if I did it and everyone just fucking laughed at me? That'd be horrible, because I'm not doing music parody, I'm not doing it to get laughs, and I'm not

"This ES-345 is actually all-original," says Jeff. "It's all there, including the stereo wiring. Somebody will get a lot of joy from that"


"I NEED A WELL-MADE GIBSON OR FENDER TO START WITH OR I'M SCREWED! IF I WORK HARD, CAN I BE PRETTY GOOD? YOU BET. CAN I BE BETTER THAN PRETTY GOOD? I DON'T THINK SO"

doing it for people to go, 'Wow, he's the best blues musician I've ever seen'. I'm just doing it for the fun of it all."

Though Garlin is self-deprecating when it comes to his guitar abilities, he's certainly prepared to put in the hours to improve ahead of his live debut come next summer.

"I'm gonna get better and better," he says. "I will practise *so* hard and I will know it inside out. But let's use comedy as an example. A guy goes, 'I'm funny, my friends think I'm funny, I'm gonna be a comedian'. Goes on stage, goes on stage, goes on stage. What that person can eventually do is become competent as a stand-up comedian. They might become a good writer, a good performer. Do they have it in them to be great? Probably not.

"When you listen to Wes Montgomery, Buddy Guy, Mike Bloomfield, any great guitarist… you can give them the cheapest bullcrap guitar and they're gonna make it sound gorgeous. I need all the help I can get! I need a well-made Gibson or Fender guitar to start with or I'm screwed! If I work hard, can I be pretty good? You bet I can. Can I be better than pretty good? I don't think so."

Garlin describes himself as a "super-huge" fan of Joe Strummer and this limited-edition Esquire comes with all the candy in its striking pink, leopard-lined case. "It makes me very happy," says Jeff. "It's one of the hardest ones for me to get rid of. It's the coolest thing I think Fender's ever come out with"

A gorgeous Custom Telecaster from the Fender Custom Shop

Jeff's Fender Mexico Robert Cray Signature Stratocaster

OFF THE CUFF

As a Chicagoan, Garlin feels strongly about keeping the blues alive, and he's spoken in the past about the commonality between blues playing and improvisational comedy. "For my style of comedy, life has to bleed into the art. But the thing about it is, out of the blues comes music that makes you smile. And, out of my blues, comes comedy that hopefully makes you laugh. It's the same thing, it's taking this difficult thing – the pain of life – and making it funny."

Which brings us back to Jeff Tweedy. "Jeff is a friend of mine, I love the guy," says Garlin. "I was helping him to write some stuff for his solo tour once and then at a certain point, as we're talking, I'm going, 'You're funny as yourself, just go up and be funny. I don't need to be helping you write stuff.' And he is that funny. He gets big laughs when he goes up there."

The Wilco star isn't the only musician who makes Garlin laugh with their surprising comedic sensibilities. "Here's somebody – and I don't care if I'm outing him – Jonny Greenwood. He's got a great sense of humour. What is Jonny Greenwood's passion? He loves comedy, the history of comedy. Now there's a guy you see onstage and you think, 'Eh, he doesn't like comedy.' But he loves comedy.

He *loves* comedy! Laurel & Hardy? Doesn't matter. The dude loves comedy. Jack White – another one who loves comedy and you wouldn't think it. He's a funny dude. John Mayer? I'm sure he'd like to take a year and switch and be a comedian.

"I get to know all these musicians because they love *Curb Your Enthusiasm*," Garlin says. "It's the beginning conversation in all my relationships with musicians. From Ben Folds to Radiohead, Wilco, Joe Bonamassa and more. A lot of comedians would like to be rock stars and a lot of rock stars would like to be comedians. But the only one I've seen where

"A LOT OF COMEDIANS WOULD LIKE TO BE ROCK STARS – AND A LOT OF ROCK STARS WOULD LIKE TO BE COMEDIANS"

I could work with them and they could really be a stand-up is Tweedy. Tweedy can tell stories. There's a certain little twinkle in his eye. He's got the richest sense of humour." ***G***

Season 11 of *Curb Your Enthusiasm* is out now on HBO. For the full inventory of Jeff Garlin's charity guitar sale, go to reverb.com/shop/jeffs-gear-depot-40. Head to jeffgarlin.com for information on his upcoming shows

TIME OUT

WORDS CAT WOODS **PORTRAITS** MIA MALA MCDONALD

In March 2020, Courtney Barnett was cooped up in a Melbourne apartment that wasn't her own, serving out her time in quarantine while watching the suburban world repeat day after day. From this most unremarkable of seeds, her stunning third album *Things Take Time, Take Time* was born. We meet the Australian guitarist to talk Jaguars, POGs and the importance of finding mystery in songwriting

Courtney Barnett's third studio album is the sonic equivalent of a warm, embracing hug. For many, the past two years have been lonely and difficult. For Barnett, it's been a time of enforced introspection and noticing poetry in the most humble of domestic circumstances, giving her the chance to demonstrate her rare knack for documenting suburban mundanity with just enough humility and humour to elevate it into art.

She is on the phone from Joshua Tree, California when, early in our interview, she gasps loudly and then laughs in that laconic, laidback Australian fashion. "Oh my god, a bee just flew at me! Sorry, that's what that noise was."

It feels as if we have inadvertently become part of a Courtney Barnett song. These are the sort of innocuous moments that Barnett imbues with profound meaning, transforming them into paeans to suburban life – as our conversation continues, we can't help but wonder what the secret meaning behind the disruptive insect might be.

Barnett's latest solo album, *Things Take Time, Take Time*, opens with an ode to the Melbourne street where she lived while self-quarantining in a friend's empty apartment. Barnett had been touring and writing in the US prior to the pandemic but, confronted by the rapidly escalating concerns over Covid-19, the Grammy-nominated guitarist opted to return home to Melbourne.

"Just before I came back, my friends, who are also my managers, let me take over their apartment and they went and stayed with family," Barnett says. "I was lucky to have this little apartment in North Fitzroy, and to be able to walk around Merri Creek and stuff."

On album opener *Rae Street*, a quarantining Barnett finds inspiration in the most unassuming daily rituals that she performs or witnesses from her window in the Melbourne suburb: a garbage truck, changing the bed sheets, even the family next door ("next door the kids run amok, the mother screams, 'Don't you ever shut up'? And there's one thing I know: the sun will rise today and tomorrow").

BALANCE POINT

Since the release of her second album, 2018's *Tell Me How You Really Feel*, Barnett had been touring and working relentlessly, giving her little time to focus on making the album that she really wanted to make. Then the pandemic happened and, while Barnett continued to perform as much as she could online, including a memorable outing at Melbourne's Royal Exhibition Building, the enforced break finally gave her time to focus on the new album in the way she needed to.

Coupled with her ambles throughout quiet Melbourne parklands, learning how to cook for herself gave Barnett a sense of balance, all of which is felt in the record's intimate and emotionally candid lyrics. All the while, the Sydney-born artist was collaborating with her co-producer, Warpaint drummer Stella Mozgawa, on the album. The two had established an easy rapport on Barnett's *Lotta Sea Lice*, her 2017 collaboration with fellow indie-rock hero Kurt Vile.

"Stella and I definitely talked a lot about music we liked," Barnett says. "It didn't start off as reference-kinda conversations. We were just swapping music back and forth. It was this organic way of showing each other the kind of sounds that we liked, and the style, and what was suitable. I would send her demos I was working on and she'd say, 'I think you might like this song by this person', so it felt organic in that sense. A lot of that music was very different, all over the place. I definitely wanted [the album] to sound warm. I wanted it to feel close and warm and familiar. I wanted to capture that repetitive, meditative kind of feeling that the songs had as I was writing them."

Barnett and Mozgawa shared music as diverse as Arthur Russell, Leonard Cohen and Nina Simone, as well as the likes of Brian Eno, Can, Alice Coltrane and Floating Points, and while that might not be instantly apparent upon listening to *Things Take Time, Take Time*, the solitary nature of lockdown meant that all these artists played their part.

"With the time to listen to more music," she reflects, "it all kinda soaked in somewhere."

BARE BONES

Barnett has never been one to indulge in the typical rock 'n' roll excesses when it comes to the making of a record, and so it's no surprise *Things Take Time, Take Time*, recorded at Sydney's Golden Retriever Studios in the midst of Covid-19 is pared back to the bare bones: she took just two instruments into the studio, a custom Maton acoustic guitar and her go-to Sunburst Kurt Cobain Jaguar.

"I used to play the Tele a lot, and a couple of Strats, but as soon as I got a Jag, I was more drawn to that sound," she says. "There's a bigness to the sound that I couldn't get on my other guitars without lots of pedals. But I feel like I can plug that guitar in and, completely clean, it has this richness to it."

The studio had been recommended by Mozgawa, and while it was initially intended to be the first studio of many, the vibe of the place captivated Barnett. She quickly decided that she'd record the whole album there, jetting between Melbourne and Sydney to capture it over the following months.

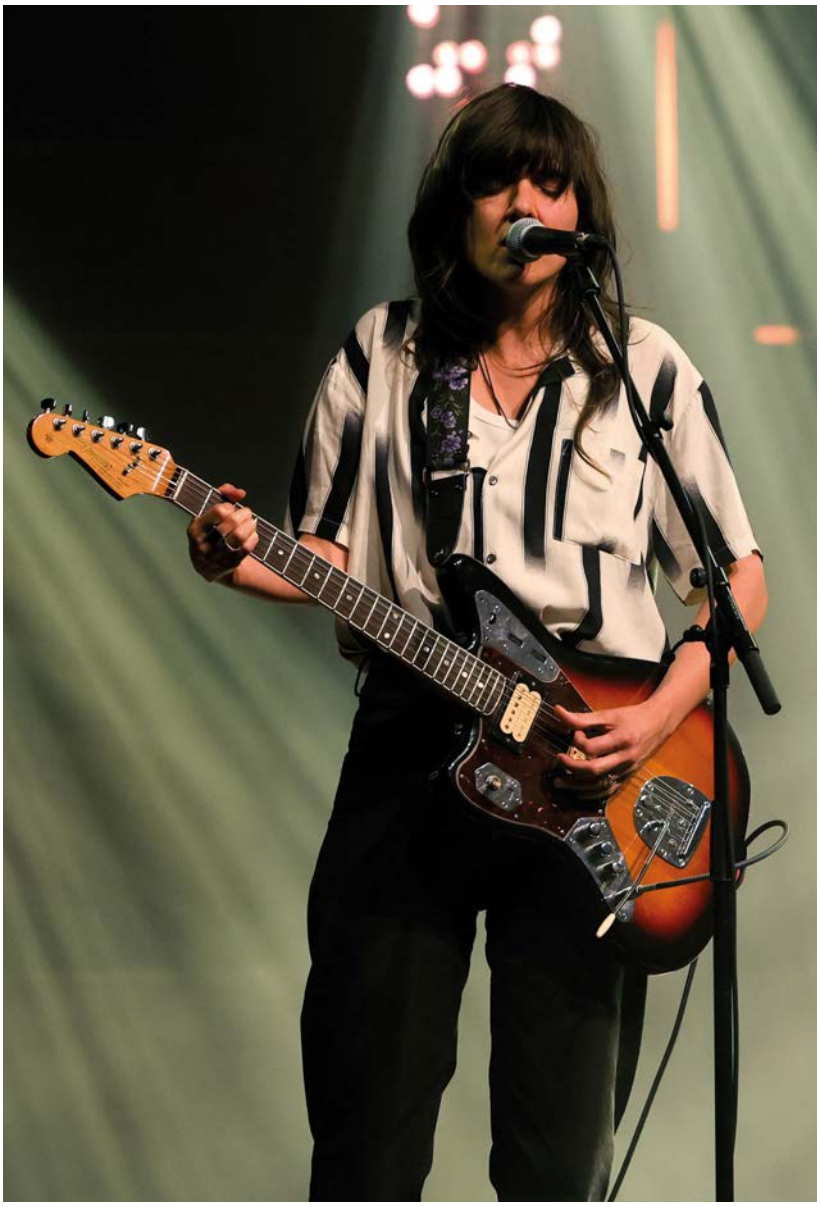
"I'd recorded a few bits all over the place and I was going to make a bit of a jigsaw album," she explains. "But then, as soon as we started working there, there was just a good energy. We worked with two people there, Simon [Berckelman] and Chloe [Dadd]. We didn't really take any gear with us. I just took the two guitars and Stella took her cymbals and Simon had this nice old gear. Working within parameters, not having to rely on too much gear [was a relief]."

In the past, Barnett has battled the demons of overpowering self-criticism. But here, rather than letting it hobble her, she leaned into the sense of self-doubt as a natural part of the creative process.

"It would be weird if you had no self-doubt or criticism of the stuff that you do," she says. "My ongoing lesson is how to balance and juggle those feelings, and they're always gonna come up because it's human nature. So, how do you deal with them and move on, and not go into a depressive hole about something?"

Instead, the album is melancholic rather than depressive, with just enough shimmering moments of curiosity and wonderment to lift the spirits. As confessional as Barnett's lyrics are, sometimes even she is surprised when listening back to her songs later. That's especially true of the surprisingly upbeat *Here's To Me*.

"I think there's a lot of mystery in songwriting," says Barnett. "I try my best to stay open to it because I certainly don't know everything about it, you know. I wanna learn more. I think a lot of the beauty of songwriting is that it helps to reveal things about ourselves or about other people. There's a lot of layers and I always find that really fascinating. I can write a song and a year later, understand this hidden element of myself. *Here's To Me*, there's something special about the song to me. It came out of nowhere, almost fully-formed. There's something special about that. I didn't do that. I don't know where that came from!"



"I COULDN'T TOUR AND EVERYONE WAS FACE TO FACE WITH: WHAT IS LIFE, WHAT DO YOU WANT, WHAT MAKES YOU WHO YOU ARE?"

Courtney Barnett playing her Fender Kurt Cobain Jaguar at Auckland Town Hall, New Zealand, July 2021

FACE TO FACE

Things Take Time, Take Time is an evolution but it still sounds fundamentally like the Barnett of old. Like a security blanket for listeners, the album is something safe to nestle in when we're not being forced to expose our souls to this newly reopened, harsh big world. It reflects the intimate way the songs were written.

"Especially in the last year, I couldn't tour and everyone was face to face with: what is life, and what do you want from life, and what do you do, and what makes you who you are as a person?

© Dave Simpson / Wirelmage / Getty Images

"WRITING BECAME THE WAY I PROCESS MY THOUGHTS. SO I DON'T KNOW IF IT'S THERAPY – IT'S JUST NECESSITY"

And, if you can't do that thing, what does that mean? Writing became the way I process my thoughts and the way that I learn how to communicate with people. So I don't know if it's therapy – it's just necessity."

As pared back as the album is, relying on fingerpicked guitar and a drum machine at its core, there is a depth of sound and a lushness here that feels enveloping and homely. With time and opportunity for adventurousness, Barnett has sought out that depth via pedals and effects.

"I kinda jump between rhythm and lead a fair bit," she says. "Over the last few years, I've experimented a bit more with pedals and tried a few different things. But, mostly I've always had a mix of distortion or overdrives, and then some more reverb/delay type pedals, maybe a chorus or something. The [EHX] Freeze pedal has been fun to play with. On the album, I had a POG I used a little bit, and I've been using one of those EarthQuaker Organizers; it kinda sounds like an organ. They're cool. You can dial in the lower harmonic and the higher. It's in a similar world to a chorus pedal or a POG. It adds this other layer of depth. Sometimes I play with a second guitarist but not really at the moment, so I like to be able to thicken out the sound."

Barnett won't be reliant on pedals in place of a band for much longer though. With the world gradually opening back up again, Barnett, Mozgawa and touring band members Dave Mudie and Bones Sloane will soon be travelling the US, Australia and Europe, as the album that began life in a Melbourne apartment finally gets to spread its wings across the world. G

***Things Take Time, Take Time* is out now on Milk! Records**

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Squier
STRATOCASTER

THE THRILL OF THE CHASE

Some long-established vintage guitar dealers have never had a Burst on their books. Despite being just 32 years of age, John Shults of True Vintage Guitar has already sold two. We catch up with him in Tennessee to hear his story

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE
PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE

Let's make no bones about it: the world of vintage guitars can be an intimidating place. The stakes are high, and recognising the various tells that indicate whether an instrument is a fake or the real deal can seem like a dark art known only to grizzled veterans of the scene. However, one young guitar dealer from Birmingham, Alabama is making waves with both his social media savvy and refreshing transparency.

We meet with John Shults of True Vintage Guitar in Nashville as the heavy summer air turns stormy. In addition to sharing some entertaining tales of his many guitar safaris, he shows up with a small but devastating array of gear for our perusal, including a first-year Stratocaster, one of the cleanest '53 Goldtops you are ever likely to see, a 1959 Gibson EDS-1275, an Americana-branded 1963 Magnatone 262B Custom, and a 1946 Fender Model 26 Deluxe. There's also the pièce de résistance: the 1958 Les Paul Standard that John flew to Cape Town to obtain back in March, and which now resides with Joe Bonamassa.

Nicknamed PJ because of the name handwritten on a label on its case, the '58 Burst is hand delivered for our shoot by Bonamassa himself. Joe is effusive in his praise of John's operation, acknowledging that the 32-year-old is "on a roll" in terms of the streak of rare instruments he has unearthed. The rise of True Vintage Guitar has certainly been meteoric, but we're curious to know what pulled John into the business in the first place.

ABOVE A late 1954 Stratocaster in this kind of condition is a rare sight indeed. "It's so clean, it's scary," says John. "The plastics on this one are very sharp, which is a pretty good indication that it hasn't been played. It's 100 per cent, other than its missing switch tip and the neck and bridge pickups, which had to be rewound. I don't know exactly why the tape is there but I believe it was to stop the arm scratching the body while the guitar was in the case"

OPPOSITE This near-mint late 1953 Goldtop was originally purchased for a church band but clearly never saw much use. Remarkably, John bought it on the very same trip to Pittsburgh during which he picked up a vanishingly rare 1960 Jazzmaster in factory black with gold hardware

"It kind of felt like gravity," he says. "As far back as I can remember, I always loved old things and always loved guitars. But I didn't really have musicians in my family – nobody was interested in music like I was. I had a guitar and did my best with it but I remember hearing about vintage guitars and thinking I would never be able to experience that."

That would all change, however, when a guitar-hunting project during his sophomore year studying business at the University of Alabama yielded a 1972 Martin D-28. "My friend wanted a good acoustic and I was like, 'This is a *great* acoustic'. He was like, 'I don't want an old guitar'. Who has ever said that in their life? It blew my mind. In my world, everyone wanted an old guitar! That was the unobtainium that everyone wanted."

John spent some of the money he'd earned from his part-time job on that guitar, and one guitar deal led to another – and then another. "I loved that guitar but thought I was more of a Gibson guy than a Martin guy, so I sold the D-28 and made some money on it and thought, 'Woah, this is the most intoxicating bit of money-making I've ever done'. I'd never really thought of it as something you could make a career out of. But I just started buying and selling and followed whatever was piquing my interest at the time – tweed Fender amplifiers and Gibson flat-tops, for the most part."

After graduating and getting married, John tried unsuccessfully to get a job at Gibson in Nashville. Though he was still buying and selling guitars, things had begun to slow down. However, a conversation with his entrepreneur father proved pivotal. "My dad was like, 'You can't slow down. You have to keep doing that'."

After two and a half years of selling guitars in his spare time and paying the bills by working at his father's company, next it was John's wife Liz who provided the support and encouragement required to make guitar trading his full-time occupation. In February 2014, they went all-in.

"Other than a downpayment on our home in 2016, we reinvested everything," John says. "The awesome super-cheap find at a yard sale… as a dealer, you can't be at every yard sale. You have to have a pool of money and be willing to spend more than the next person. It seems risky and, if you aren't passionate about guitars, it very much is. But if you are, and you find yourself looking at guitars online all the time, you just gather that knowledge in your own time because

you love it. I only buy and sell guitars that I personally am passionate about. I'm just a low-volume shop – I don't do strings or capos or straps or anything like that. I only do vintage stuff."

ROAD MOVIE

One of the things that sets True Vintage Guitar apart on social media is how John documents the many road miles he puts in. You might see a guitar pictured in some far-flung location or even a deal going down in a Walmart parking lot.

"I'm embarrassed to say this but I've definitely followed what the Instagram algorithm wants," he admits. "A still picture of my guitars, the best I can do, is good. And people like to see that. But just a quick cellphone shot of me on the side of the road with a crazy vintage guitar and a location that's not where they normally see me is far more effective, and also tonnes of fun."

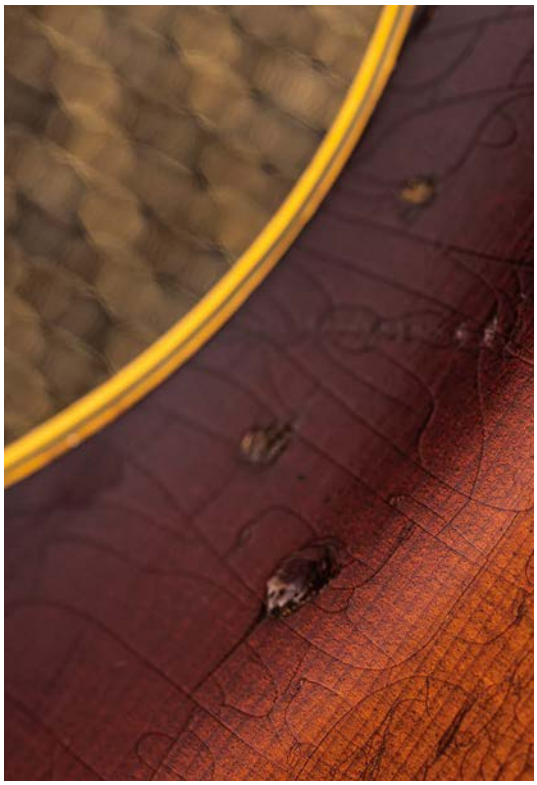
It might be tiring but when chasing killer vintage guitars, there's no substitute for the hard yards. "These things happen so quickly," says John. "If someone decides to sell, it's likely they've been talking to two or three other people. I've gotta be the first guy there – you've just gotta get in the car.

For the longest time, I drove this 2005 Ford Crown Victoria. It's the perfect road trip car but it is not cool. But it was so cheap and just rock solid. That was one of the things that meant I was able to close these guitar deals. It was just like, 'Yeah, I'm on my way. West Texas? Okay, I'll be there in 12 hours'."

On arrival, are there any particular strategies that John likes to employ to ensure that the deal goes smoothly?

"It's really easy to get so focused on whether you are getting a good deal that you end up with a serious face, and no-one's having fun," he cautions. "We're buying a cool guitar, this person's being paid a lot of money… this is *fun*. So the first thing I should do is play it and enjoy it, instead of opening up the case and going, 'Is this original? Is this neck warped? Is there a headstock repair?'

"Even if I notice problems as soon as the case opens, I'm always careful to just pick it up and enjoy



it," he continues. "And when the seller sees that, it kind of brings defences down a little bit. And also I try to share information as freely as I can. Some people don't expect me to try to empower them with knowledge but I try to make it approachable and understandable. If I show up to buy a custom-colour Fender and want to take it apart, people don't like that, so I try to share why I want to take it apart and inspect the guitar's finish.

"Another thing I look for is: does the patina match everywhere? Does the patina of the case match the guitar? Maybe they sourced a case later, maybe it's not nefarious… but the guitar also could be refinished."

DEAD END

On a roll he may be but, as is the case for many an intrepid dealer, there have also been occasions when John's many hours at the wheel have been wasted.

"I showed up to buy a 1957 Stratocaster and the gentleman who owned it had bought it used in the late 1960s," he says. "It wasn't collectible then. It was just an old guitar – and he played it and loved it. But he wasn't a lifelong musician, he'd just never sold it.

"He was an older guy and wasn't really familiar with technology, so the pictures he sent me were terrible. But I just jumped in the car because I was like, '57 Strat! We'll work it out when I get there!' I show up and it has this *big* crack – it had taken some kind of really big knock. And it looked like some kind of seam separation, which can happen on Fenders when it's a three-piece alder body and the glue joint fails a little bit – that can happen and it's not catastrophic. But this one, he'd only sent me pictures front-on, so it looked like a seam separation. But when you turned it to the side… it went all the way through the neck joint, the most structurally important part of the guitar.

Gibson made no more than 46 of these spruce-top doublenecks. On this example, the back of both headstocks feature stingers. The person who inherited the instrument rather foolishly threw away its original case because it was dirty. "It's a guitar that I'm over the moon to have, at least for a short time," says John

The '58 Les Paul Standard John tracked down in South Africa was offered to him by a retailer in Cape Town. A local family walked into the shop looking to sell the instrument, which had belonged to their late grandfather

"He wasn't trying to trick anybody; he said it had a crack. It had taken a lot of pursuing for him to agree to sell, so he was so confused when I didn't want to buy it. But I wasn't going to tell him one price and then show up and offer half. So I turned around and went home. That was eight hours' driving each way."

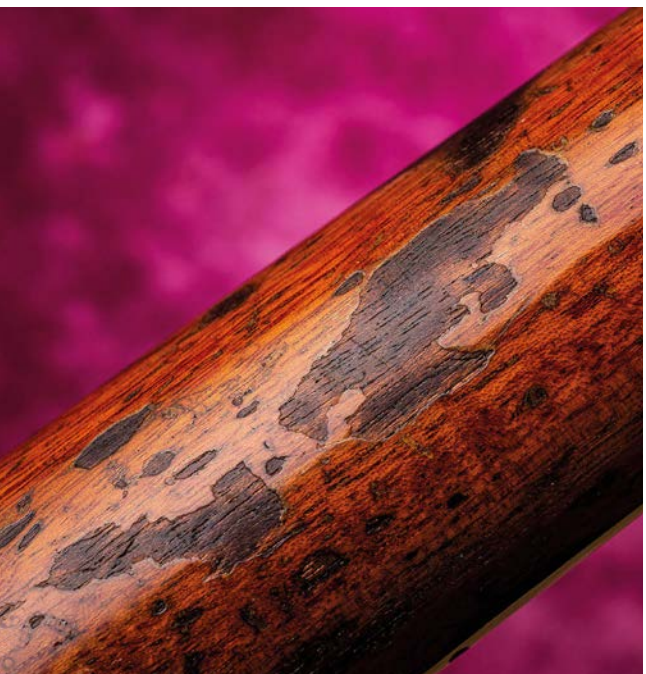
We wonder if John ever feels any sense of personal risk walking into these situations alone, in the middle of nowhere – and even if things ever get a little scary.

"Absolutely!" he says, laughing. "I've bought a vintage guitar in a trailer park outside of Knoxville at 1am. That was interesting. But I do my best to communicate over the phone so I hear their voice. I need to hear them answer questions in a way that makes sense for the story. If I show up to buy your doubleneck and it's perfect, playable and mint and you don't know anything about it, that's a problem. If I show up and it's covered in gross 1970s finger juice, it plays like junk, you don't know anything about it and are asking for help with it, that makes sense to me. You inherited it. That's what they look like when you inherit them – they don't look perfect. A lot of the time they look terrible.

"The story is so important. The timeline has got to make sense. Usually their timeline is off – they might say they bought it in '66 but it didn't exist until '71. But that's close enough. After that much time, with original owners, the timeline often gets confused. But if I show up and the guitar is super-clean and perfectly set-up, I don't like that. I'm probably walking on that guitar because that's a guitar that's currently being played. And then if the person's trying to tell me they don't know what it is, those things conflict."

AIR MILES

Not long after our meeting, John lands his second Burst of the year in the shape of a 1960 Les Paul Standard purchased direct from its original owner,



This 1946 Fender Model 26 Deluxe is a thrilling amp to plug into. "I had it serviced but shockingly enough, that original speaker cone from 1946 is in spectacular condition and it sounds pretty good," says John

a woman from rural Illinois who'd played it with her band in the early 1960s before putting it aside when life got in the way. For John, Illinois was at least a little closer to home than the '58 he found in Cape Town.

"That one didn't follow the rules of any other guitar safari," he says. "It was deep Covid – the international flights were empty. I could take up an entire row, I could use as much bin space as I wanted. So to bring the guitar with me on the plane was not a problem. Although KLM cancelled my return flight and I had to come back from Cape Town via Doha in Qatar."

Gruelling homeward journey aside, John's South African trip was a resounding success, not just because of the extraordinary guitar that he brought home with him but also because of the warm welcome he received – despite being more than 8,000 miles from his Alabama home.

"South Africa was a dream come true," he says. "Normally I'm in super-rural places but Cape Town is like the LA of South Africa, it's fantastic. I was so welcomed by the sellers. They had me over for a *braai* – a South African barbecue. It was tough going over there because it was such a big deal and a little bit scary but they were so cool, so inviting and just made me feel like family."

When asked what's next for True Vintage Guitar, John says he'd like to explore Bursts a little more. "I went right to '58, the one that's hardest to get," he says. "I'd love to have a '59!"

Something tells us you'd be a fool to bet against him tracking one down. **G**

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PHOTO: Courtesy of Guns N' Roses

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MAD MAX: FURY ROAD

Riffs, flames and fury! We meet the production team that built the flame-spitting, headline-stealing, made-from-garbage guitar that won the hearts of film fans around the world, as well as the man who played it

WORDS SEAN McGEADY

Twisted metal. Death-defying stunts. 45-foot flames. Angle-grinding guitar riffs. No, this isn't a Rammstein show. This is *Mad Max: Fury Road*. Regularly referred to as one of the greatest action films of all time, this turbo-charged chase movie raced from the mind of George Miller, the Aussie auteur behind 1979's original *Mad Max* and its two follow-ups. When Miller's modern update finally screeched onto the big screen back in 2015 following years of production battles, the acclaim was explosive. Critics and fans alike fawned over its bone-rattling action sequences, its sharply drawn world and its large cast of colourful and unforgettable characters.

With the Namibian desert standing in for post-apocalyptic Australia, *Fury Road* sees Max Rockatansky, Imperator Furiosa and the five wives that she liberates from the film's big bad, Immortan Joe, fleeing across the desert, with Joe and his army of very loyal, very loud War Boys in hot pursuit. But of all the movie's madcap characters, one made more noise than most: Coma, the Doof Warrior.

Wearing a red onesie and the dead skin mask of his murdered mother (that metal enough for you?), the Doof Warrior is an eyeless field musician whose role is to marshal Joe's army and relay his battle orders via sound. His weapon of choice? A high-speed collision of garbage, legitimate art and movie magic: the fire-spitting, double-neck *Fury Road* guitar.

SPEED KING

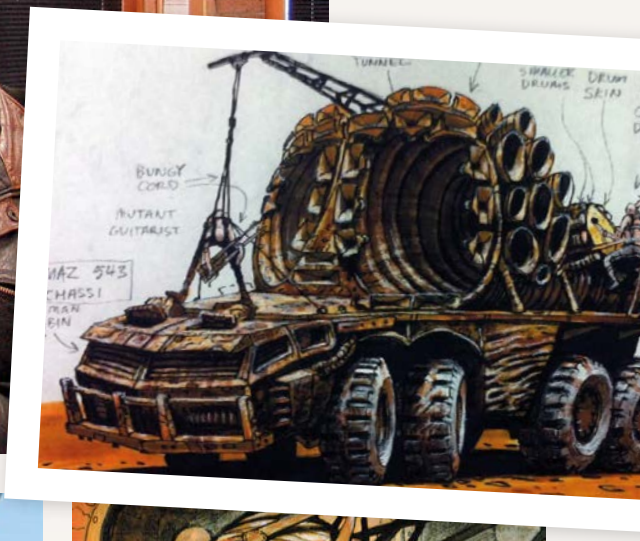
"I'm into the hot rods and the speed shit," Michael Ulman says over Zoom. A graduate of Boston's Northeastern University, Ulman is found-object sculptor, a scavenger who repurposes trashed radios, chainsaws and kitchen appliances – basically whatever he can get his hands on – into detailed models of cars, planes, speedboats and especially motorcycles. The 'speed shit'.

One of the Boston-based artist's most important early pieces was Lo Rida, built in 2001. A low, blue, badass two-wheeler that Ulman describes as his "dream bike", it crystallised the approach that his career artworks would take, his pieces growing in complexity along with his confidence. "That first motorcycle might have had maybe 10 pieces," he says. "Now they have thousands of pieces. Sometimes I don't know when to stop."

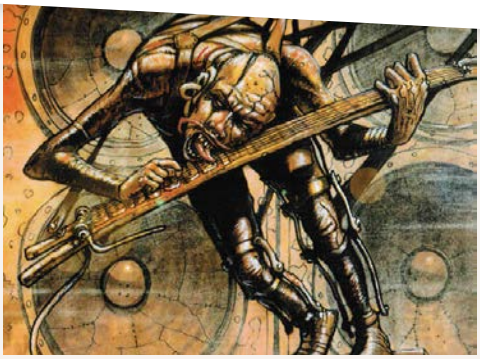
In 2007, Ulman turned a standard US mailbox into a miniature 1930s Ford hot rod. The piece took off, wheeling around art blogs in an age before Instagram made viral art so easy to see. Sometime later, the hot rod parked up in a California gallery, where it would eventually attract the attention of Sydney-based production company Kennedy Miller Mitchell.

George Miller had been reaching out to found-object artists around the globe, dab hands whose passions lay in transforming discarded doodahs and doohickeys into art.

Sculptor Michael Ulman with director George Miller



Peter Pound's Doof Wagon and Doof Warrior concept art circa 2000



The Doof Warrior wielding the *Fury Road* guitar

Miller was rounding up makers who could imprint their own signature style on the then-nascent *Fury Road*, to give its post-apocalyptic world an authentic lived-in feel. Miller eventually reached Ulman in 2009 before offering him the opportunity of a lifetime: come to Australia, bathe in the best of the country's junkyard scrap, and generally make a mess for three months. Three days later, Ulman was on his way.

"I didn't have a ticket. I didn't have a visa. I didn't have a thing," he says. "My passport was probably outdated. They got all that in three days and then first-classed my ass to Australia. Epic. Epic. Epic."

Once he was down under, Ulman and Belgian artist Olivier Pauwels – whose signature baby doll faces are hidden all over *Fury Road* – spent weeks in the production's Sydney workshop whipping up weapons and car parts and *Mad Max* miscellany, turning Australia's trash into Hollywood-fit treasure. "We were making weapons hand over fist," Ulman says. "We made all the steering wheels. We made all these things."

Ulman had been brought onboard because of the 'speed shit', to add his intricate touch to *Fury Road*'s many, many custom vehicles. But about a month into his three-month stint, he was given another job, when production designer Colin Gibson came to him with what would be his defining role on the project.

Concept art for the *Fury Road* guitar, as well as the Doof Wagon and the Doof Warrior himself, was drawn up by Australian storyboard artist Peter Pound as early as the late 1990s, with Miller having arrived at the idea for the film about 10 years before then. But not all members of the team were privy to such details. "When I got there," Ulman says, "I had no idea there was even a guitar in the movie."

He continues: "[Colin] was like, 'There are three stipulations: it has to have two necks, it has to look like the sickest weapon, and it has to throw flames 45 feet'. I was like, 'That's it? Done.'"

Ulman had never built a guitar before, and he wasn't given much direction. As he tells it, it was unclear to him whether the guitar would even need to be functional. Ultimately, Ulman was given free rein to create his artwork without limitation. The team would figure out its functionality later. He had two months.

Ulman's MK1 guitar. Notice the differences between this and the finished instrument overleaf

"I SUPPOSE YOU CAN'T BE PICKY IN THE WASTELAND; I HAD TO MAKE DO WITH WHAT I WAS GIVEN"

"No-one knew what the guitar was going to be like," he says. "They told me what they wanted, they gave me a frickin' wad of cash, and they put me with this guy who took me to the junkyard. The junkyards in Australia are insane. Acres and acres and acres and acres. The production company would be like, 'Okay, we'll take that acre of junk', box it all up and take it to the facility so the guys could go through it. They didn't care what the fuck was in it. I just went hog wild digging through the parts. Bells and whistles and bumperettes and spark plugs. All this amazing stuff. I got it back there, laid it all out on the table, and I started building."

Combing through mountains of refuse, as well as buys from bric-a-brac and antique stores, Ulman eventually found everything he required to engineer the picture-perfect post-apocalyptic guitar. Exotic tonewoods? No thanks. Fine nitrocellulose finish? No way. This instrument was to be made of sterner stuff.

Ulman used a bedpan for the body (eat your heart out, Leo Fender), which he sliced in half horizontally and stuffed with tuba valves to form its guts. He decorated the body with car horns, voltage dials and part of a Zildjian cymbal, as well as a dash of the 'speed shit' in the form of a motorbike kickstand repurposed as a whammy bar. To hold everything together, he worked up a lattice-style metal skeleton onto which the parts could be attached.

For all its outlandish components, the instrument would also need a standard guitar and bass neck. Ulman got two single necks, guitar and bass, both of which were capped with Chevy bumperettes adorned with spark plugs to cover their headstocks. He'd have liked to have made them work, connecting the plugs and tuning buttons so that turning the plugs affected the strings, but there was no more time. Ulman was done. He'd soon be heading home, leaving his Frankenstrat on the slab. The team's next task? Bring the monster to life.

FINE TUNING

Aussie industrial designer and propmaker Matt Boug began as a junior, with *Fury Road* the first full-length live-action feature he'd worked on. He started in 2010. At first, he was assigned to the speed shit too. "I started in the motorcycle department," he says. "My job was basically to take whatever motorbike they pointed in my direction and dress it in the *Mad Max* style." After all the bikes had been embellished, Boug became a kind of pre-production troubleshooter for Colin Gibson, whose biggest trouble was turning Ulman's creation into a working guitar.

At this stage, the instrument was still very much a sculpture: non-functional, with no real parts or pickups, no strings attached. Boug had to tighten up Ulman's artwork, fix the pieces in place, tweak the aesthetics and install the all-important electronics. Basically, Ulman says, "Matt had the painstaking task of taking apart all my cool shit and trying to shove some other shit in there to make it work".

Matt Boug testing out the finished guitar

Boug's chassis held the guitar and bass necks in line with their bridges

Boug grew up with guitars in the house but had never built one before either. So, for inspiration, he looked to that grand master of home luthiery, Brian May. "I remembered that in my childhood I'd read an article about the Red Special," says Boug. "He made that out of old stuff from his house – there was a piece of wood from his mantelpiece, and some of the springs are old motorbike parts." Boug found the article, hoping that May's methodology might prove a guiding light. It didn't. "It completely daunted me," he says. "I was like, 'Wow, this is an epic undertaking.'"

Instead, Boug drew on what he and Ulman had done on the film so far, and decided to approach the guitar as if it were a vehicle. Meanwhile, production designer Gibson had asked his buyers to purchase a cheap, unbranded double-neck, which was dumped on Boug's desk along with a simple directive: here's a double-neck guitar/bass, here's Ulman's guitar – make it work.

Out went Ulman's guitar and bass necks, which had been sawn across the 20th and 22nd frets, respectively, and in came the full-length necks from the Fender-style double. But they still had to be secured in place. "Michael had put all the pieces together but it needed something to hold it all together, kind of like a chassis," says Boug. "So the first thing I did was conceive a chassis to fit into Michael's structure so that I could hold the neck and the bridge in tension properly. I built a chassis and then bolted all the panels on it."

Faced with inexpensive pickups from what he thinks was an Asian-made Fender copy, Boug wasn't confident. He wanted to use higher-grade electronics so that he could minimise issues once the guitar was exposed to the elements in the Namibian desert. "I wanted to make it all good-quality so that it wasn't a problem in Africa," says Boug. "But [Colin] insisted that I just use this stuff. And I suppose you can't be picky when you're in the wasteland; I just had to make do with what I was given."

The difficulty came in finding a place for the electronics within the guitar's tuba-stuffed half-bedpan body. Boug had to take the entire thing apart several times over to install the electronics, before finally re-wrapping Michael's sculpture around them and his new chassis. The finished instrument features three Strat-style single-coil guitar pickups, two Precision-style bass pickups, a volume control, a tone control, a guitar pickup switch, and a switch with which to flip between the guitar and bass (or run both simultaneously). Stretching between the necks is the fuel tube that feeds the flamethrower, which is capped by a protective sheath made of halved truck exhaust pipes and controlled via the whammy bar.

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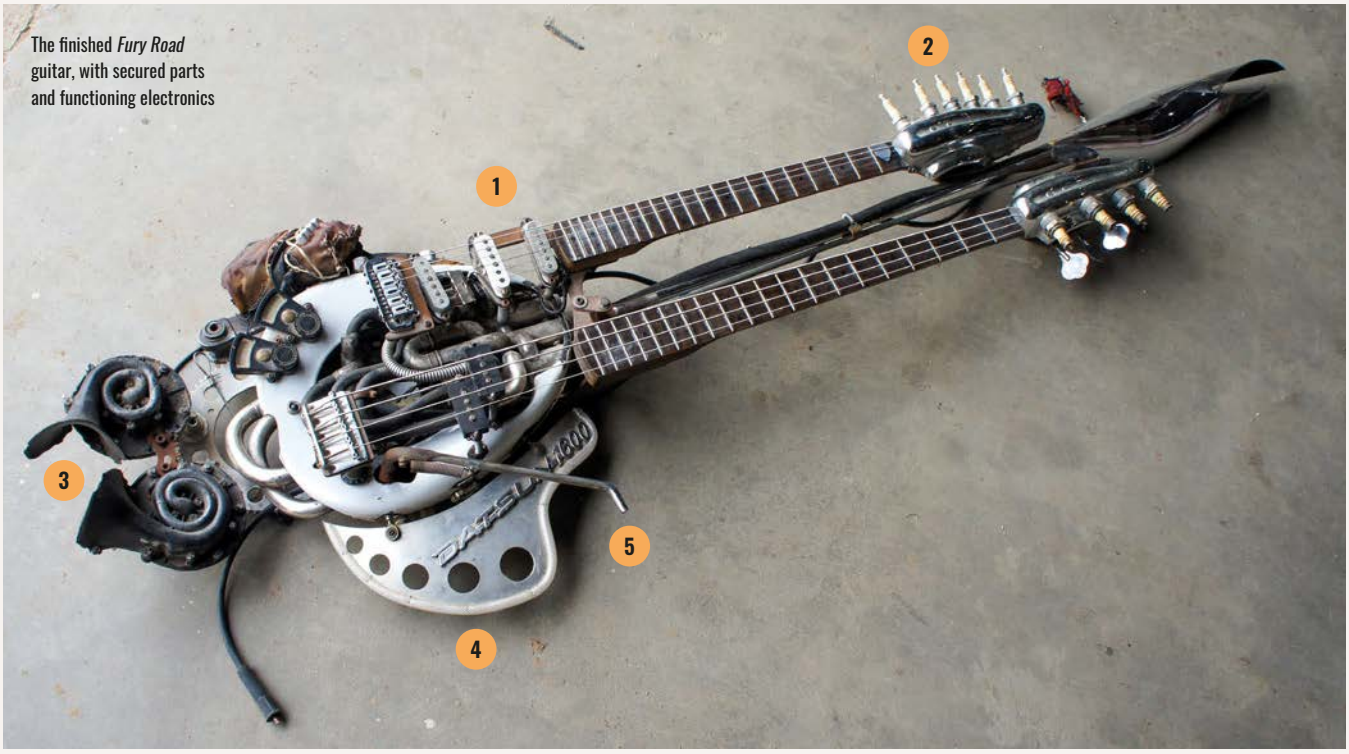


The finished *Fury Road* guitar, with secured parts and functioning electronics

"It was epic," Boug says. "There were more 400 pieces, with all the little screws and the plumbing for the flamethrower. It was complex to disassemble. It was never designed to be pulled apart and put together. I struggled to get all the electronics in."

The *Fury Road* guitar is a microcosm of the movie: loud and proud, made up of many moving parts and stuffed with small cosmetic details that matter as much as the big picture. To bring Ulman's guitar more in line with the film's tone, for example, Boug fixed a Datsun 1600 badge onto the cymbal piece. "Just to add extra car elements to it," he says,"the belief in the *Mad Max* world being that they're all car nuts." To give the guitar a more appropriately post-apocalyptic appearance, Boug also took a blowtorch to it, charring the cheap necks and fretboards. Roasted maple, indeed.

With the guitar built and the movie's Sydney pre-production complete, Ulman and Boug's creation would eventually land in Namibia in early 2011, before later being passed to the man who would wield it. But first, they had to find him.

iOTA as the Doof Warrior, hanging from bungee cords on the Doof Wagon

HELL BENT FOR LEATHER

Black leather gimp mask, blackened teeth, Cherry Red Gibson SG, iOTA turned up to his 2012 screen test ready to rock. "I just wore what I would've worn if I was in *Mad Max 2*," he says, "some feathers, black eyes and brown teeth, leather and stuff."

Having performed the lead roles in stage productions of raucous musicals *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* and *The Rocky Horror Show*, and having been a *Mad Max* maniac ever since he saw the first film at a drive-in aged 11, iOTA is no stranger to leather and stuff. Spikes, studs, sequins, iOTA has seen – and worn – it all. But this would be his wildest ride yet.

The Australian-Maori actor and musician had released four studio albums and appeared in numerous stage shows by the time he auditioned for the Doof Warrior in 2012. With his SG in tow, he seized the part. "To be honest, I could've gone in there and just noodled and that would've been enough," he says. "I didn't really do much. I just made a lot of noise. It was more the physicality. George liked that I leaned forward and put one of my legs out the back. I can remember him saying to me, 'As soon as you did that, I knew you were the right one for the job'."

Other actors who auditioned for the role went for more impressive feats of technical guitar playing. But clearly that's not what the production team were after. "It was weird. I had no idea what this character was going to be like or how a guitarist was going to fit into the *Mad Max* world," says iOTA. "But I figured it would just be *rough*, y'know? It would be something that was guttural, screeching, rather than…" he mimics complicated fretwork.

Having landed the role based on his aggressive, grotesque physicality, iOTA was invited to the Kennedy Miller Mitchell HQ in Sydney a few days later, where he would learn more about his fate.

ANATOMY OF FURY

1 Fender copy necks, pick-ups and parts
2 Spark plugs
3 Car horns
4 Zildjian cymbal with a Datsun 1600 badge
5 Motorcycle kickstand flame-thrower control
6 Output switch: guitar/both/bass
7 Bedpan body
8 Volume control
9 Guitar pickup selector: neck/middle/bridge
10 Tone control
11 DigiTech HardWire SC-2 Valve Distortion pedal

"I walked into the office," he says. "There was a great big table with George Miller sitting at the end of it. The room was surrounded by storyboards, and there were model trucks and little figurines all around. There was a truck that was the Doof Wagon. I saw this truck thing with speakers everywhere and a little guy dangling on a rubber band on the front. I was like, 'Wow, that's cool,' and he was like, 'Yeah, that's gonna be you'."

HEAVY METAL

Back when he first built the guitar, Ulman hadn't paid much mind to such trivial issues as ergonomics. "In my head, it doesn't have to work," he says. "I wanted to make it so [whoever would have to play the guitar] could hold it comfortably. But in my head, 'comfortably' just meant that his hand placement and the strap were right. I didn't think about weight."

Thankfully, Miller and his team did. According to Boug, the guitar weighed about 58 kilos – that's about nine stone. The production team had to find a solution. Unbeknown to iOTA as he toyed with a tiny figurine hanging by an elastic band from a model truck in Miller's office, that was precisely it.

In a delightfully DIY rebuttal to modern guitar weight-relieving practices, the production team would mount the guitar on bungee cords to relieve iOTA from having to take its full weight. However, with iOTA also suspended on bungee cords and the real Doof Wagon, a German 8x8 former military truck, in perpetual motion, he'd have a fight on his hands even playing the thing.

A few months after that meeting in Miller's office, iOTA was in the Namibian desert, gazing up at what, until now, he had only seen over Skype: the *Fury Road* guitar. "The whole thing was just such a trip. I couldn't believe what was happening. When I got to Namibia, it was hanging on some sort of rack. It was plugged in and I just got onto it as quickly as I could. I climbed up the ladder and they strapped me in and it felt like you were on the second storey of a building looking down. It was very cumbersome and not at all pleasant to play. But it made total sense. You really had to fight with it."

Upon getting to grips with the flame-spewing double-neck, iOTA quickly learnt the limits of its tone. "I loved the sounds that came out of it," he says. "But it was all a little too clean. That's why I suggested we get a distortion pedal on it and just treat it like a gong, just more of an angry atmosphere – make it scream and screech rather than try to play a riff or something."

iOTA went to the nearest music store, in the Namibian city of Swakopmund, and picked up "whatever was the most distorted pedal" they had, which happened to be a DigiTech Hardwire SC-2 Valve Distortion unit. Look closely at the finished film (or at the above image) and you might just catch it, swaddled in a custom-made leather pouch and attached to the lower bout of the guitar. "It looked really cool," says iOTA. "It just looked like it'd been there forever."

With iOTA strapped in and the sound sorted (sort of), the actor was given the freedom to do whatever the hell he wanted, up to and including using the whammy bar to fling huge jets of fire into the sky.

"'Yeah, just do it every now and then. Whatever. Just have a go,'" he says. "There was a couple of runs that we did where, you know, 'Can you just do heaps of the flame this time?' Lots of ideas." As it turned out, though, the guitar's in-built flamethrower wasn't as impressive as the film-makers had hoped, with the flames not showing up well on screen. Canny cinema-goers might be able to tell that the flames in the finished film are computer-generated.

"Basically that was my brief the whole time: just get up there and do what you want to do. Just rock. Be crazy," iOTA says. "It was very physical. You've got protection on your knees, pads anywhere you feel you might get injured. They were very careful. That's all it was: 'How are you feeling? Are you ready to have a run?' It's a crazy feeling to be hanging there, fighting against [the guitar] as the truck's turning. It was wild. It was fuckin' wild. I was just screamin' my head off. It was like a roller coaster."

Despite all reasonable precautions, serious injury must have crossed iOTA's mind as he hung from a bungee cord on a moving ex-military wagon while explosions rang out all around him? "I think that's just something you have to put to the back of your head or you're probably not gonna do it," he says. "Something could go very wrong. You just hope it's not going to…"

Some scenes, however, were deemed too dangerous for iOTA, at which point he was replaced by stuntmen. Some were too dangerous for the guitar too. "Whenever there's a fight or a stunt in movies like *Fury Road*, there'll be some kind of soft version of the weapon," says Matt Boug, whose boss Burt Burless built the stunt guitar for the film. "It was basically a process of taking the guitar that we'd built and then moulding and casting that into a version that looked exactly the same but was made out of softer materials, like foam rubber and soft plastics."

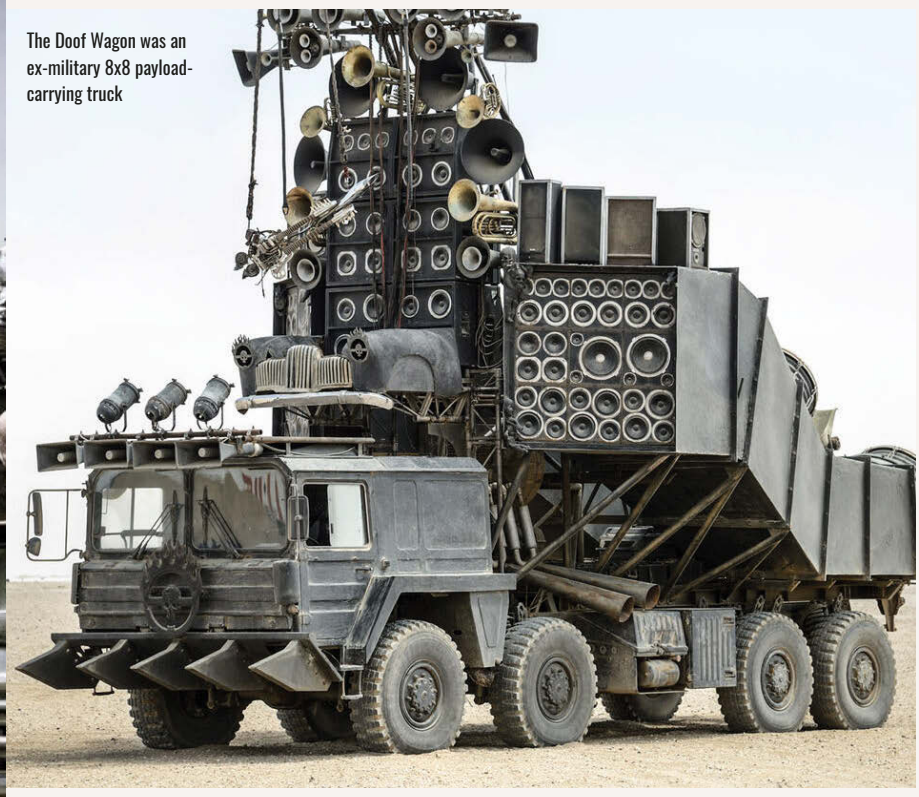
Despite having a stunt guitar on set, the real deal suffered in the desert. "The guitar was probably there for eight or nine months," Boug says. "I tried to shrinkwrap as much of the electronics as I could to protect it from the elements. But a lot of it was exposed. It got dropped a couple of times. I had to pull it apart, figure out what had broken and then put it back together again."

The amp suffered too. The 10-tonne Doof Wagon, based on a high-mobility payload-carrier, was adorned with walls of speakers and horns – not all of them wired up – as well as 'reverberators' made from old air-conditioning ducts and designed to carry the sound of the four Taiko-style drummers across the sand flats. Beneath a grille under iOTA's feet, there was also a small amp on its back, pointing directly up at him.

"It was cranked," he says. "By the end of [the shoot], it probably wasn't even making sound because it was fucked. But you could barely hear it. There was trucks and wind

© Collection Christophel / Alamy Stock Photo

Immortan Joe (centre) surrounded by his War Boys and the Doof Warrior (left)



The Doof Wagon was an ex-military 8x8 payload-carrying truck

and explosions and people yelling. It was mayhem." For his part, iOTA didn't care what sounds he was making. "I was just going for it. I was trying to imagine what it would be like to be that person. I don't think he'd be thinking about playing something sweet. He'd be trying to break that thing."

Ultimately, it didn't matter much either, as iOTA's on-set cacophonies didn't make the final cut. He was mic'd up and the sound team were recording, "it just wasn't good," he says, laughing. "I even had in-ears for a while, until we realised it was pointless."

Instead, in 2013 George Miller turned to Dutch engineer, producer and composer Tom Holkenborg, AKA Junkie XL, for the film's score, which blurs the lines between diegetic and non-diegetic. The desert setting saw Holkenborg look to stoner rock and acts such as Kyuss for inspiration, which guided his playing and gear. His rough riffs were recorded on a Cherry Red '74 Gibson SG and a Silverburst 2012 Les Paul Studio, tuned down to CGCGBE and running into a Fulltone Full-Drive 2 MOSFET and a Fulltone Fat-Boost pedal. From here, the guitars ran into an Orange Thunderverb 200 Head and cab set so loud that the sound-pressure levels distorted the microphones.

"IT WAS VERY CUMBERSOME AND NOT AT ALL PLEASANT TO PLAY. BUT IT MADE TOTAL SENSE. YOU REALLY HAD TO FIGHT WITH IT"

END OF THE LINE

Much of that 'speed shit', the elaborately decorated vehicles created for *Fury Road*, never made it home. "There was some stuff that got destroyed," Boug says, "some of the cars and bikes, stuff that George knew he was never going to use again, that all got crushed over in Africa. They picked select things to take back to Australia, some for the reshoots that took place there, others that George was fond of."

Thankfully, the guitar was one of them. Today it resides safely in storage at Kennedy Miller Mitchell. But it's not the only one out there – its creator made more…

"When I try to sell my art, I'm like, 'Oh, buy a motorcycle, buy a hot rod, buy this, buy this'," Ulman says. "When I work up the courage to say, 'Hey, I made the guitar for *Fury Road*', their minds… everything just drops. Two people were like, 'I want one!' So I made them their own. I would never have thought that anybody would've wanted that. But there's a huge fanbase. People are making stuff of the guitar and they don't even know who built it."

He's right. In the wake of the film's release, the Doof Warrior and Ulman's guitar were parodied by Conan O'Brien and Funny or Die with all manner of fun fan-made recreations cropping up online, including a scorching Epiphone Les Paul mod and a flamethrowing ukulele. Ulman's guitar and iOTA's Doof Warrior have even been immortalised as a Funko Pop figurine.

"It just holds its weight in that movie," Ulman says. "It's such a character. When I say to people, 'Do you remember the guitar?' they're like, 'That guy was my fucking favourite!'" **G**

Keep your eyes on *Guitar.com* for more Guitar On Film

Fender Twin-Amp
VOLUME
TONE

THE MONEY SHOT

CME EXCLUSIVE FENDER PLAYER JAZZMASTER IN PACIFIC PEACH

As Chicago Music Exchange debuts new colourway Pacific Peach on the CME Exclusive Fender Player Jazzmaster, we head to the Windy City for a closer look

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE **PHOTOGRAPHY** ELEANOR JANE

Chicago Music Exchange recently unveiled its first original Fender colourway, Pacific Peach. Inspired by vintage kitchen appliances and the classic car culture of Southern California, the colour appears, for now, only on the CME Exclusive Player Jazzmaster.

Available for $874.99, the impressively spec'd instrument is equipped with USA-made Pure Vintage '65 pickups, series/parallel four-way switching, a matching headcap and pre-routed rhythm circuit cavity for aftermarket mods.

"It was a dream to be part of something like this," says CME's Director of New Product Dan Bordonaro, who collaborated with Fender to create the attractive new finish.

"It started several years ago, visiting Fender's office in Hollywood," he tells us. "I remember just walking by a pile of unassuming paint samples on a shelf. There was a salmon colour that I just loved but, if I remember correctly, it wasn't an approved colour yet. In my mind, I truly can't remember how similar that was to where we are today. But I know that's where this starts. And honestly, at that time, CME just wasn't in a position to buy enough guitars to justify Fender mixing a special colour just for us.

"Over the next couple of years, CME was growing and I just kept noticing coral and salmon colours on products everywhere and just fell in love with it. In 2018, I landed on photos of this old early 1960s Ford Galaxie 500 in Samoan Coral. I sent those photos to my contacts at Fender and that became the dream. In some lights, it's peachy and leaning orange. In others, it's pinker, like salmon. It wasn't really metallic but it really moved with the light and I fell in love."

Samoan Coral ended up acting as the codename for the new colour during its development process. Further inspiration would come later, courtesy of a retro-styled kitchen appliance.

USA-made Pure Vintage pickups, series/parallel four-way switching, a matching headcap and a pre-routed rhythm circuit all feature on the limited-edition Jazzmaster

"That same year, KitchenAid released a limited-edition colour of the year series in Bird of Paradise," says Dan. "I bought the stand mixer. The KitchenAid colour ended up being the most accurate inspiration for Pacific Peach. Then, in 2019, the Pantone colour of the year was Living Coral and so that's a huge deal for fashion, and it just reinforced our obsession with leaning into a colour like this.

"Fender already had Tahitian Coral and Fiesta Red but they're too red to hit this mark. And Shell Pink was too pink. It needed to live perfectly in the middle. Over the last couple of years, I've requested it on custom builds with Fender Custom Shop and also with Kauer Guitars, which were beautiful. But of course, custom guitars are expensive and simply out for most of us, present company included. We even did something similar on some special batches of Reverend Double Agent OG models, which are gorgeous. But, all along, the goal was to put it on Fender models that everyone can afford. It just seems like it was made for a matching headcap Jazzmaster with those pre-CBS vibes."

According to Dan, the R&D process involved a lot of video conferencing, as well as on the spot inspiration sharing. "Google image search link-sending, screenshots back and forth, walking by something in a clothing or furniture store and texting a photo on the spot to Fender, and then eventually painted pieces of alder being shipped back and forth – all that good stuff!"

Eventually, after three waves of paint swatches, they found the right hue. "We have a truly great relationship with Fender's product development team in Hollywood," says Dan. "So although this kind of work to validate new colours is a time investment, they were hugely supportive the whole time."

Though the pandemic pushed Pacific Peach's original 2020 release date back by a year or so, here in late 2021, it's finally ready to appear in store.

"I don't know if I realised it at that time," Dan says, "but looking back, I know my goal was to make it feel like it came out of a time capsule. A colour that no-one ever knew existed. It's a false narrative but we like to pretend. Honestly, in the early 1960s, you have major automobile and appliance manufacturers using colours very similar to this. There's no reason this couldn't have happened at Fender. But, to the best of our knowledge, it just didn't. And so here we are in 2021, working with Fender to make it real." G

Pacific Peach will appear on more Fender models in 2022 but for now, the only place to get it is on the CME Exclusive Fender Player Jazzmaster. To order yours, visit chicagomusicexchange.com

Fender Twin-Amp
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LIGHTNING IN A BOTTLE

Indianapolis Colts owner Jim Irsay has spent 25 years assembling the world's leading collection of rock 'n' roll, American history and pop culture artefacts. To celebrate 400 issues of *Guitar Magazine*, we touch down in Indiana to pay him a visit

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE
PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE

OPPOSITE We haven't seen many 1959 Les Pauls with more dramatic flametops than this

BELOW RIGHT This 1963 Gretsch 6120 was used by John Lennon on *Paperback Writer*

Over the years, some remarkable guitar collections have featured in the pages of this magazine. But, in terms of owning historic instruments with genuine rock 'n' roll credentials and sheer spending power, nobody can top Jim Irsay. For the past quarter of a century, the billionaire owner and CEO of the NFL's Indianapolis Colts has spent big to obtain some of the most iconic instruments in rock history. Gilmour's Black Strat? A cool $3.9m. Jerry Garcia's Tiger? $957,500. The Stratocaster that Bob Dylan played at Newport Folk Festival in 1965? $965,000. The Gibson SG that George Harrison used on *Revolver*? $567,000. The list goes on and on.

Yet rather than accumulating expensive toys in some crass display of wealth, talking with Irsay reveals that he has a deep love and appreciation not only for the timeless music that these instruments were used to create but also for what they represent as cultural – and indeed countercultural – objects. It's not just guitars either. Irsay's collection includes Jack Kerouac's original 36-metre typewritten manuscript for *On The Road* ($2.4m), Hunter S Thompson's Red Shark convertible, Abraham Lincoln's walking cane and an original Apple II manual signed by Steve Jobs in 1980.

Perhaps as a nod to Irsay's own well-publicised battle with addiction, there's also the working manuscript for *The Big Book*, aka *Alcoholics Anonymous*. Bought at auction in 2018 for another $2.4m, Irsay acknowledges that the text and its famous 12-step programme "has literally saved millions of lives".

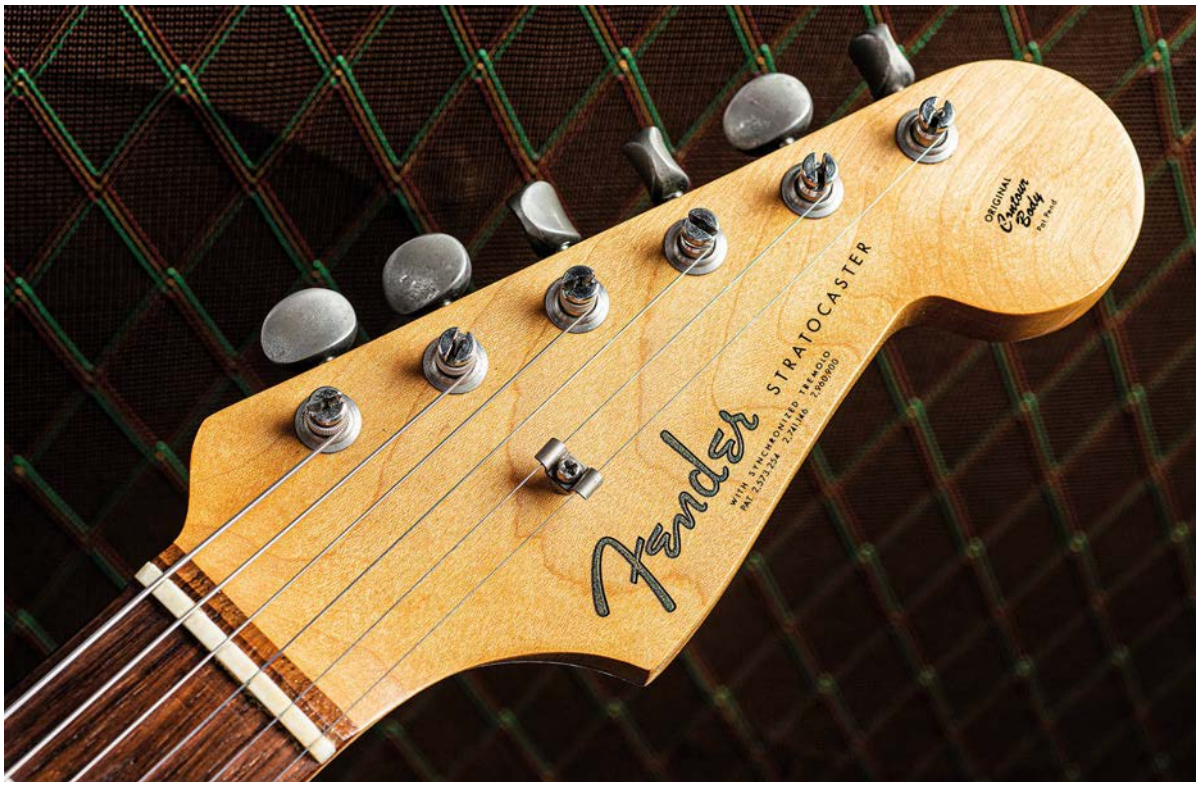
"I CAN'T BE PETE TOWNSHEND OR CHRISSIE HYNDE OR WHOEVER BECAUSE THAT'S JUST NOT ME. BUT I CAN BE A CURATOR"

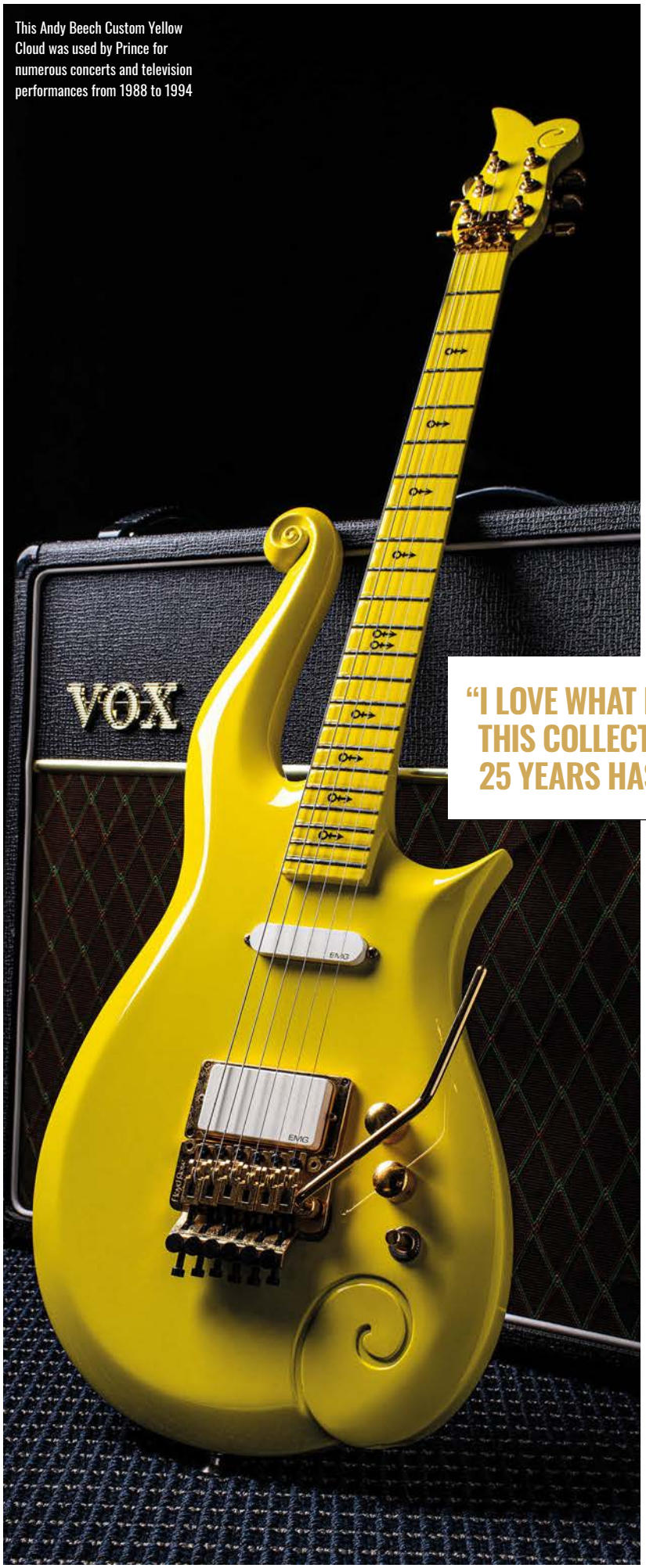
VOX
GRETSCH
Bigsby

Most of these artefacts reside either at Irsay's home or in his office at the NFL team's headquarters and practice facility. In the interests of making the collection more accessible to the public, a series of pop-up exhibits and concerts in the USA and Europe are set to be the precursor to the opening of a museum akin to Seattle's MoPOP, which was founded by Microsoft's Paul Allen. A personal friend of Irsay's, Allen passed away in 2018 but could regularly be found bidding on many of the same celebrity-owned instruments as the Irsay team, including Ringo Starr's Beatles-era drums.

Although the museum's permanent location is yet to be finalised, for the 62-year-old Colts owner, it's all about inspiring young people to pick up the baton. "History is so important," he says. "So much of what we're about as a world, as humanity, is tied to music. It's been that way ever since the cavemen were around the fire and they scrawled on the walls.

When Bob Dylan went electric at Newport Folk Festival in 1965, it changed the course of pop history. This guitar was there





This Andy Beech Custom Yellow Cloud was used by Prince for numerous concerts and television performances from 1988 to 1994

They beat things – there was always this feeling of self-expression. And a deeper feeling than just having words or sign language, or hunting and gathering systems. To me, it's really important that the museum is alive. How you experience it when you walk in? I want it to be interactive."

Irsay envisages a space where these instruments coexist with the rest of the collection to tell the story of American history and 20th century pop culture. Whether it's David Gilmour's Martin D-35 or the franchise his late father Robert purchased back in 1972, he is adamant that he sees himself more as a custodian than an owner. After all, millions of people have strong and intensely personal connections to their favourite musicians and sports teams.

"When I first got the [*On The Road*] scroll, *Rolling Stone* said that I would destroy it," Irsay says, laughing. "We did some fun things with it but we were always careful. We never put it in harm's way.

"I LOVE WHAT I DO. I'M BLESSED. WATCHING THIS COLLECTION COME TOGETHER OVER 25 YEARS HAS BEEN A BEAUTIFUL THING"

But I like people to be able to say, 'I played Tiger', if you are a guitar player of any magnitude or even if you just want to hold it. I get letters all the time. 'Please can I come on a pilgrimage, I just want to see Tiger, it means so much to me.' Our emotional and spiritual lives are so tied to the arts, so tied to music. If someone has a death in the family or a transformative time in their life and a certain song came out at that time, they remember that moment. It's way bigger than just saying, 'Oh, that's a nice song. That's a cool groove.' It's much more than that. I mean, it's the fabric of people's lives. It's so important to me that in the museum, people can play things and touch them.

"Like any music lover or fan, I want to try to have fun with it and share it," he continues. "But I don't possess it. I don't have any ownership over it. I want to make that very fucking clear. With the museum it's about, 'How do you create the Willy Wonka factory? How do you sell the golden tickets?' I can't be Pete Townshend or Chrissie Hynde or Natalie Merchant or whoever because that's just not me. But I can be a steward and a curator.

"It's the same as the Horseshoe [the Colts]. I have to look after the Horseshoe – that's my job. Sometimes it's not popular. Sometimes you might think I'm coldhearted. But it's professional football. I have this obligation. But the great thing is, I love what I do so it's not work. I'm blessed. I don't really have a job. Watching this collection come together over about 25 years has been a beautiful thing. There's

Irsay purchased Jerry Garcia's Tiger for $957,500 in 2002. Built by luthier Doug Irwin, it was the Grateful Dead star's main guitar from 1979 onwards and in 1995 was the last guitar he ever played in public

OPPOSITE John Lennon received this Rickenbacker 1996 model in 1964 as a replacement for his damaged black 325. It was later gifted to Ringo Starr during the making of *The White Album*

THIS PAGE Eric Clapton played this 1939 Martin 000-42 during his MTV Unplugged performance in 1992

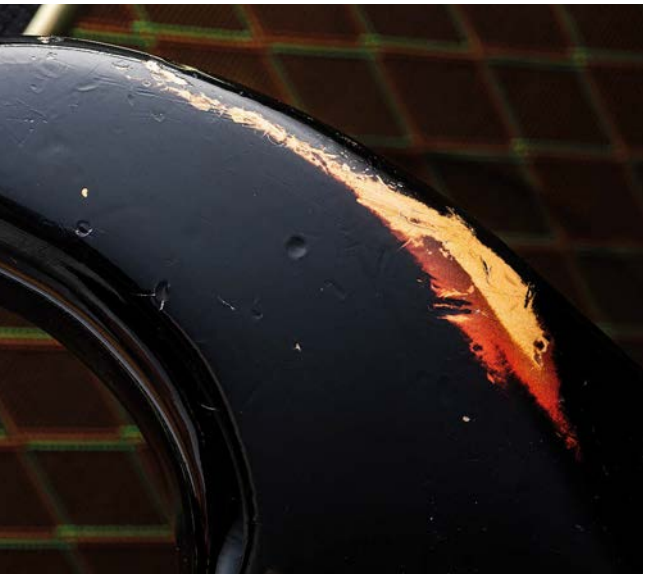
so many things. I have things I don't even know I have. You can't keep track, it's impossible. My biggest regret was when I lost Wilson, the volleyball from *Cast Away*. But I was kind of early in the process and I was outbid. I'll never let that happen again."

PLAYER POWER

Despite their extraordinary value, Irsay is relaxed when handling these historic instruments. Almost alarmingly so. During the course of our photoshoot, he not only pretends to smash the Black Strat but he also mischievously tucks a lit cigarette under the strings behind the nut. That said, these legendary guitars aren't simply props for photoshoot shenanigans these days – Irsay is keen to get the instruments in his collection into the hands of musicians.

This is evidenced on day two of our stay in Indianapolis when the team puts together an impromptu concert performance in the grounds of a disused psychiatric hospital. The line-up features a cast of leading local session pros led by guitar curator/technician Marc Johnson, plus Irsay on vocals and the guest of honour, Kenny Wayne Shepherd. Marc's weapon of choice is Dylan's Newport Strat, while Kenny Wayne selects the Black Strat.

David Gilmour's famous Black Strat needs no introduction. Purchased at auction for $3.9m in 2019, at the time the guitar was the most expensive ever sold



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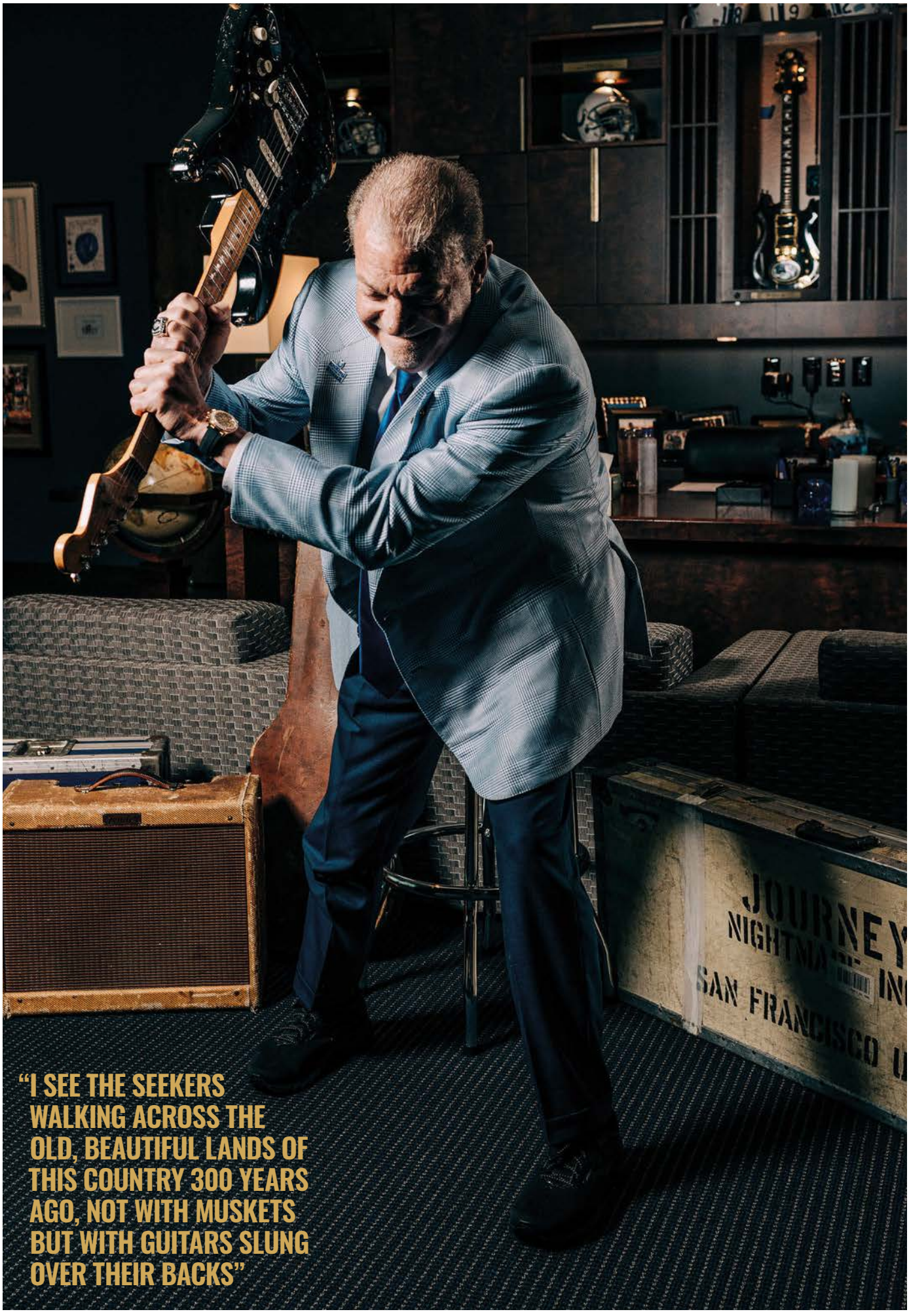


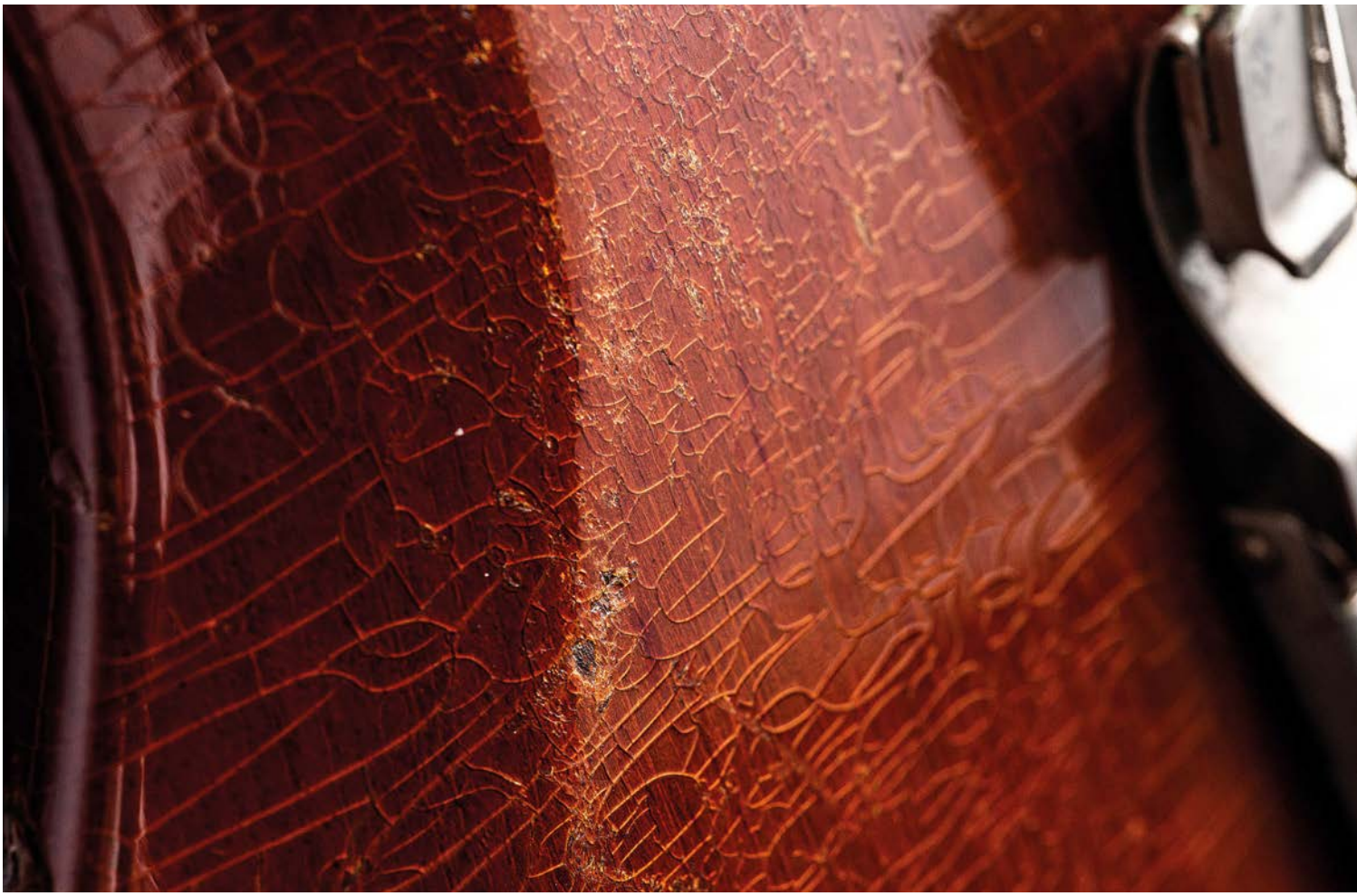
"I SEE THE SEEKERS WALKING ACROSS THE OLD, BEAUTIFUL LANDS OF THIS COUNTRY 300 YEARS AGO, NOT WITH MUSKETS BUT WITH GUITARS SLUNG OVER THEIR BACKS"

A 1960 Les Paul Standard with a factory Bigsby and double-white PAFs

"I don't think it's ever had that kind of blues played on it before," Shepherd later remarks – and our own close encounter with the Black Strat reveals a setup that's clearly been optimised for a less ferocious touch than that of the Louisiana-born blues-rocker. Shepherd may prefer heavier strings and an action with a little more fight but it doesn't stop him from sounding pretty spectacular with David Gilmour's longtime number-one plugged into a vintage 5E3 Deluxe. For the small audience in attendance, it's a thrill to hear such a storied guitar played at close quarters and in a different musical context.

Though many of the pieces in the collection have been present during seismic moments in popular music history, it's interesting to compare guitars that spent a long time in the service of one artist to those instruments whose spell in the limelight was more fleeting. For example, Gilmour's Black Strat, heavily modified with very few original parts other than the body, still feels imprinted with the Pink Floyd star's identity. The lightness and elasticity, the short vibrato arm – everything points to the elegant, lyrical playing style for which Gilmour is famous.

Then there's Bob Dylan's Newport Stratocaster. When the folk messiah turned Judas and played the songs *Maggie's Farm*, *Like A Rolling Stone* and *Phantom Engineer* (an early version of *It Takes A Lot To Laugh, It Takes A Train To Cry*) with an electric band on 25 July 1965 at the Newport Folk Festival in Rhode Island, their short but controversial set would later



be hailed as a watershed moment in pop history. Yet the 1964 Stratocaster that Dylan played that day was soon left behind on a private aeroplane and he never looked back. Today, the neck's startling lustre and the overall originality of the instrument tell us little about its former owner. Perhaps fittingly, there's a frustrating and slightly icy sense of detachment here that leaves us feeling no closer to rock's greatest poet and greatest enigma.

And then there's John Lennon's 1963 Gretsch. Though Lennon's time with the guitar was brief, the double-cutaway 6120 featured on the groundbreaking *Paperback Writer* and *Rain* sessions in April 1966. In November the following year, the Gretsch was gifted to his cousin David Birch. While recording *Revolver*, The Beatles were reimagining the pop landscape from one studio day to the next, which certainly gives this instrument a special allure – even if Lennon obviously preferred his Epiphone Casino. Notwithstanding, it's simply one of the most appealing vintage Gretsches we've ever played – and it instantly feels like home. Did we grant ourselves a moment of self indulgence and actually play *Paperback Writer* on one of the guitars it was recorded with? Of course we did.

George Harrison acquired this 1964 SG Standard in 1966 and it quickly became a studio favourite, featuring on *Revolver*

ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

During our conversation, it's apparent that Jim finds a sense of spirituality in the transcendent power of music. He also draws parallels between trailblazers in music and creatives in business – "watching James Brown work is no different than Steve Jobs" – and over the years has found kindred spirits in the many musicians he counts as friends.

"It's like Dylan says, 'He not busy being born is busy dying'," Irsay asserts. "When I talk to artists I know and I start trying to get them to talk about the past, a lot of them are like, 'I'm not interested in that. I want to talk about now. I want to talk about what I'm doing today and I'm interested in the moment that I'm in.' As long as we're living and breathing and experiencing life… we're adventurers, you know? We're journeymen. We're always seeking. I see the seekers in my mind walking across the old, beautiful lands of this country 300 years ago, not with muskets but with guitars slung over their backs. Because to me, that's really what it's about."

In seeking out and exhibiting objects from the past, Irsay aims to inspire young musicians to create the iconic music of the future. And there's no sign

ABOVE This 1977 Les Paul Deluxe must be one of the most-heard electric guitars of all time, as it was formerly owned by Neal Schon and featured on the band's smash hit *Don't Stop Believin'*. Irsay purchased the guitar at auction in July 2021 for $250,000

RIGHT Irsay with a much-modified Les Paul Custom formerly owned and played by Les Paul himself

of the pace slowing any time soon – the collection continues to expand and the plans for it get more and more ambitious. Recent additions include the SG Special used by Pete Townshend in The Who's exhilarating performance on *The Rolling Stones Rock And Roll Circus*, as well as the Steinway piano used on tour by Elton John from 1974-1993.

As well as being used by Elton himself at sold-out Dodger Stadium shows in October 1975, the piano would go on to be played by Freddie Mercury during Queen's *A Day At The Races* tour in 1977 and by Paul McCartney in front of a television audience of more than one billion people during the Live Aid finale in 1985. In another Beatles connection, Elton also played the Steinway at a concert in Madison Square Garden in November 1974. To settle a bet, John Lennon showed up and played three songs in what would prove to be his final public performance. Irsay is clearly thrilled with this acquisition, describing it as "unbelievable".

Before the time comes to stop the tape, we have to ask our host the question that invariably comes up when two Beatles obsessives engage in conversation. Given his great love for wordsmiths such as Dylan and Kerouac, Irsay's answer is perhaps unsurprising. "In high school it was always, 'Are you a Lennon or McCartney man?' I mean, I love Paul. But there's just no question. I was a Lennon man." G

For information on the collection's upcoming tour dates, head to jimirsaycollection.com

FUZZ WAS THE FUTURE

PART FIVE: SATISFACTION GUARANTEED

In the final column in his raucous mini-series on the birth of fuzz, JHS main man Josh Scott explains how a pedal that sold no units in 1964 would go on to change the course of music forever – with a little help from Keef

WORDS JOSH SCOTT

Well, folks, it's been a trip. For the past four months, we've charted the unlikely and remarkable birth of fuzz, from a one-in-a-million studio accident to the creation of the first-ever effects pedal: the Maestro Fuzz-Tone FZ-1. We've also covered how that particular box of wonder was marketed so woefully that it almost ended up as a footnote in the history of popular music. *Almost*.

So how exactly did fuzz become one of the defining sounds of rock 'n' roll? And how did the FZ-1 in particular overcome its disastrous product launch in 1962? The answer, as with so many things in life, is Keith Richards.

A New Kind Of Sleepwalking

The Rolling Stones debuted as a band on 12 July 1962 at the Marquee Club in London. This was the same year that the Maestro Fuzz-Tone was released. But the Stones had *slightly* more success when it came to marketing their wares.

Mick Jagger and Keith Richards had formed the band the year before. By '62 they were a rising force in the new sound of British rock. They released their first single, a cover of Chuck Berry classic *Come On*, on 7 June 1963, and dropped their self-titled debut album on 16 April 1964.

The Stones performing in New York in 1965 – notice the all-important Maestro Fuzz-Tone at Keith Richards' feet

© Michael Ochs Archives / Getty Images

At about this time, the Stones were started gaining a reputation as arguably the era's first real "bad boy" musical group, aided enormously by a *Melody Maker* article that asked, "Would you let your sister go with a Stone?" As their popularity grew, the Stones became regarded as the edgy, dangerous counterparts to the clean-cut and wholesome Beatles (even if the Fab Four were no angels themselves). Think of it as a mid-century Blur vs Oasis.

In 1964, the Stones' cover of Buddy Holly's *Not Fade Away* peaked at No.3 in the UK and No.48 in the US. But they still hadn't totally made it as a band. Not until 1965, that is.

Given that the Human Riff would later claim that he once stayed awake for nine straight days, it's clear Keith Richards was not the most consistent sleeper. In fact, he would regularly wake up in the middle of the night inspired, and got into the habit of leaving a hand-held Phillips tape recorder next to his bed to help capture his flashes of late-night genius.

On the morning of 6 May 1965, Keef played the past night's tape back as usual. He listened to a few minutes of himself noodling around on an acoustic guitar – and then he heard it: a riff. *The* riff. The 10-note melody in the key of B that would catapult the Rolling Stones to No.1 on the charts in the UK and the US. It was the golden ticket that every rock band dreams of. It was *(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction*.

Remarkably, Keith had no memory of playing the now-iconic riff the night before. Even in the recording, he heard himself drop his guitar pick and start snoring about two minutes after he laid the melody down.

When Keith Richards plugged into the FZ-1 in 1965, it wasn't just a step in the evolution of rock, it was a step forward in sonic evolution

Feel free to bring that up next time your boss gets mad at you for napping in the middle of your shift; just tell them it's your 'creative space'.

Keith knew a good idea when he heard it. The Stones wasted little time in turning that riff into *Satisfaction*," recording it four days later at Chess Studios in Chicago, and then at RCA, Hollywood, California on 12 May.

Just one month after that bolt of midnight inspiration struck, the Stones released *Satisfaction* as a single, on 5 June 1965. The song rocketed to the top of the charts, knocking Sonny and Cher's *I Got You Babe* off the top spot and becoming the Stones' fourth UK and first US No.1. It's since been ranked No.2 in *Rolling Stone* magazine's 500 greatest songs of all time (twice), and has been covered by everyone from Otis Redding and Devo to Britney Spears.

Happy Accidents

It's impossible to think of that iconic riff and not hear the sizzling fuzz of Richards' Maestro Fuzz-Tone. But here's the kicker: the fuzz effect was never meant to make it onto the finished track. Keith had used the FZ-1 as a placeholder for a horn section that he planned to re-record for the final track. Remember the demo record praising the FZ-1's ability to mimic "booming brass and bell-clear horns"? Apparently that marketing line worked, on Keef at least.

(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction hit record stores so soon after Richards had come up with the riff in part because it wasn't meant to be – the Stones' manager had released the unfinished recording without the band's permission. Keith didn't realise until he heard their song on the radio – and he was understandably horrified. What were people going to think? Bear in mind, people had only recently adjusted to racy hits such as Bobby Darin's *Splish Splash* and the Kingsmen's *Louie Louie*. Were they ready for fuzz?

In a still-evolving world in which the sound of broken, sputtering fuzz guitar was not yet an ingredient for pop radio, this song could've totally tanked, which might have put an end to the Stones' momentum before they even got started. But as any Rolling Stones fan knows, you can't always get what you want – but sometimes, you might get what you need. Keith Richards' horns might never have materialised on the finished track but it turned out that *Satisfaction* – and, by extension, the FZ-1 – was precisely what pop music needed.

The song would catapult the Stones from the fringes of the English rock scene to worldwide fame, and propel the sound of fuzz across the globe. From this moment on, the FZ-1 flew off the shelves. Gibson went from selling no FZ-1 units in 1964 to shifting more than 3,000 in 1965 and a staggering 20,000 in 1966. The tables had turned. "Now but not yet" was officially over. It was just *now*.

The Evolution of Influence

So what does all this have to do with Marty Robbins and a sad country song? As Malcolm Gladwell would probably say, they were both tipping points for guitar. Robbins' *Don't Worry* created the circumstances that birthed an idea and the Stones' *(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction* finally delivered that idea to the world on a grand scale. A happy accident conjured up the concept and another accident gave guitarists and the wider music industry the push they needed to finally embrace it, a new form of distortion-driven rock.

Technologies aren't just invented. They continually evolve. We see this not just in sound technology but also in the evolution of musical genres. West African antiphonies became American field hollers, and field hollers turned into folk music, which morphed into the Delta blues. The Delta blues adopted the guitar as its primary voice thanks to players such as Robert Johnson, Memphis Minnie and Muddy Waters, who in turn inspired guitarists like Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck and Keith Richards. Even the Rolling Stones' name comes from a Muddy Waters song. It's all connected.

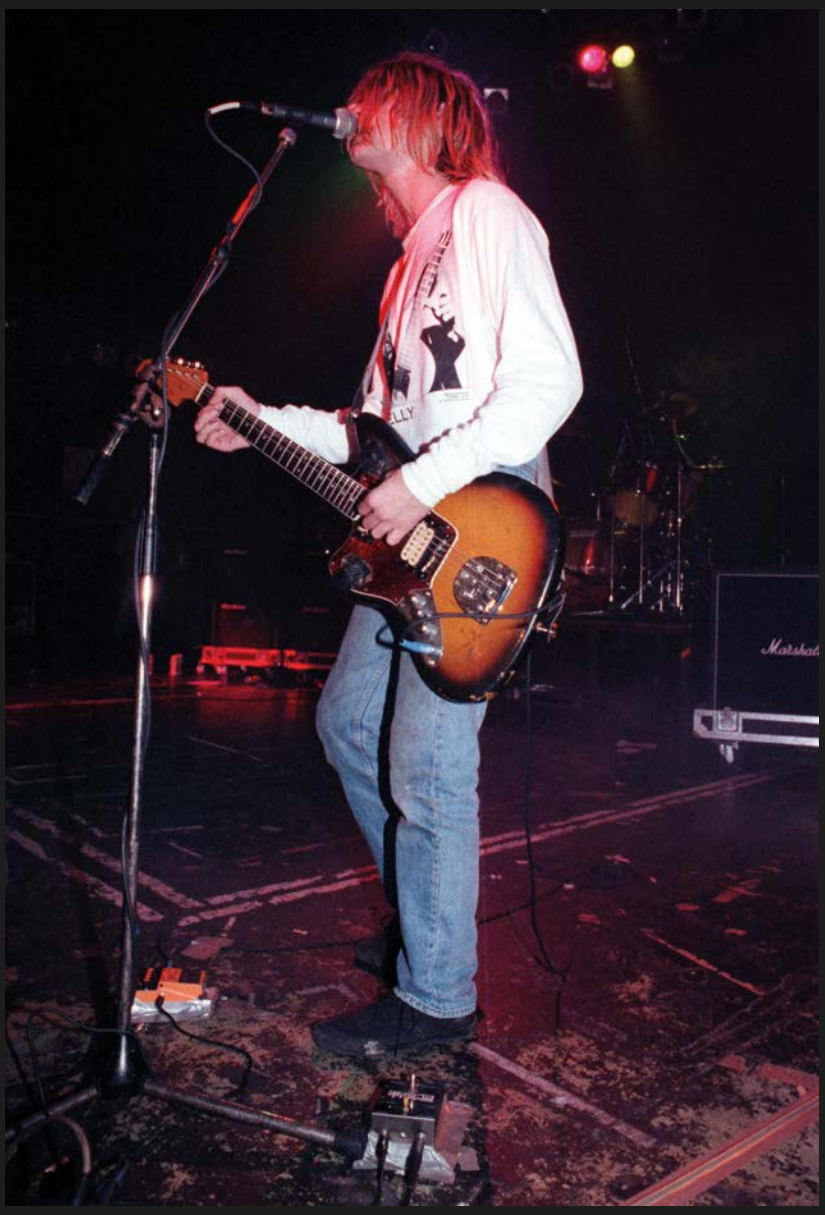
When Keith Richards plugged into that FZ-1 in 1965, it wasn't just a step in the evolution of rock music, it was a bold step forward in sonic evolution full stop. Before him was Junior Barnard's overdriven Fender Super amp on *Bob Wills Boogie* (1946), Willie Johnson's piercing tube-saturated lead lines on *How Many More Years* (1951), Willie Kazart's heavy rhythm sound from a broken speaker stuffed with paper on *Rocket 88* (1951), Link Wray's use of cranked amp distortion and tremolo on *Rumble* (1958) and, of course, Grady Martin's busted mixer channel fuzz tone on *Don't Worry* (1962).

Little by little, each of these songs pushed the boundaries of acceptable guitar distortion. As a result, each of these sonic pioneers is partly responsible for making the edgy and violent fuzz tone on *Satisfaction* so popular. Each track slowly gained more and more cultural permission for the use of fuzz, until pop fans and the wider industry was finally ready to accept it, the sound of distorted guitar.

At first, players cranked their amps and tore their speakers, which gave an unassuming radio technician from Tennessee enough permission to put his broken sound into a simple stompbox that could sit at your feet. Each pioneer gave the next a bit more freedom to explore.

That said, it's tough to fully understand the significance of these events in 2021. We take for granted that *Satisfaction* was a smash-hit in 1965, and we can't comprehend the full impact that this song had. We saw it again decades later, when Kurt Cobain stomped his Boss DS-1 and let loose a wall of sonic angst that broke the music industry, and our perceptions of what popular music could do.

If this is hard for us to understand in 2021, try to wrap your brain around how strange it was in 1965.



Just a few years earlier, the accordion was London's most popular instrument. In the span of a decade, the electric guitar evolved from an instrument of precise clarity to a weapon of mass, fuzzy destruction.

Two years after *Satisfaction*, Jimi Hendrix evolved the fuzz sound even further with the release of his debut album *Are You Experienced*. By the end of the decade, we had embraced the even more leaden and abusive guitar tones of Black Sabbath, Blue Cheer and Led Zeppelin. But if not for that accident in a Nashville recording studio in 1961, popular music might sound completely different today. I'd go so far as to say that the 1960s musical and cultural revolution as we know it today would have never happened at all, at least not in the same way.

Marty Robbins' 1961 recording session stands out like no other in the history of recorded music, because it makes us ask, "What if it hadn't happened?" Thankfully though, the stars aligned, fate intervened and some might even say that providence prevailed. We may not have known it at the time but fuzz *was* the future. G

Head to Guitar.com to keep enjoying Josh's columns, and check out more effects adventures at thejhsshow.com

ABOVE Kurt Cobain performing at London's Astoria Theatre, 1991

OPPOSITE The Jimi Hendrix Experience on the BBC show *Happening For Lulu*, 1969

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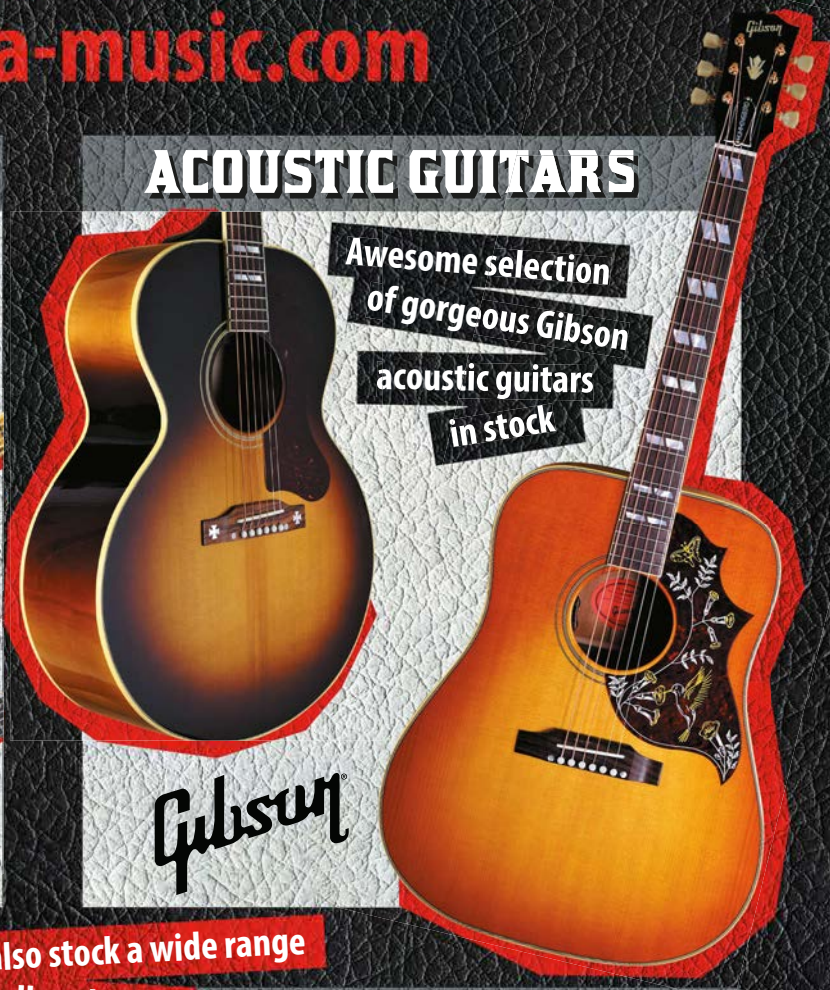

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TRENT MODEL 1

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

Crafted in the heart of the deep south – that's right, Dorset in England – this eco-friendly offset promises all the quality of boutique luthiery at a mass-produced price

Straight out of the box, this guitar smells different. But you get used to it. And besides that, there isn't much to dislike about the Trent Model 1, a stylish, surprisingly affordable solidbody crafted in a one-person workshop on the south coast of England.

That unusual fragrance is a clue to one of this instrument's most notable features: Elliott Trent builds his guitars with an eco-minded approach that involves sustainable woods (in this case obeche), vegan-friendly glue and solvent-free water-based paints. The thin satin finish really allows the grain of the obeche to show through and, here in Trent's own variant of Fender's Sonic Blue, it looks spectacular – like a luxury version of the old Gibson 'faded' effect. And don't worry, we're assured the smell fades away soon enough.

But what kind of guitar is the Model 1? One glance at the silhouette suggests it's an offset, in the sense that the waist is further forward on the top side than on the bottom, as with a Jazzmaster or Jaguar. This should come as no surprise. There are more offsets on Instagram right now than you can shake an asymmetrical stick at, and with long-established UK brand Gordon Smith also launching its first offset this year in the form of the Gatsby, it's clearly the design paradigm of the moment.

But in the case of the Model 1, it's only the body outline that fits this trendy template. When it comes to the stuff that matters in terms of tone, this is more like a mash-up of a Telecaster and an SG Special.

The essentials, then: we're looking at a fairly straightforward six-string with an obeche body if you opt for this open-pore finish or poplar if you prefer full gloss, which will set you back another £250. The neck is maple with a Bolivian rosewood (pau ferro) fretboard. On our review sample the scale length is 25.5 inches, the neck carve is a slimmish C and the fretboard radius is 12 inches. But all this can be spec'd to your own preferences at no extra cost.

The soft angles of the headstock go well with the guitar's gently futuristic shape, especially as the face is colour-matched. Our only complaint here is that, even against this pale shade, the gold Trent logo is crying out for a fine black outline to really make it pop.

The bridge is a through-body hardtail with Strat-style bent-steel saddles. But there is another option here that could make this guitar much more appealing to fans of 'real' offsets: a Hosco vibrato tailpiece modelled on the kind fitted to classic JMs and Jags, paired with a tune-o-matic bridge. All of which adds £100 to the price.

UK luthiers have no shortage of homegrown talent to call upon when it comes to pickups. Trent's choice here is a pair of Old Guard P-90s, described by their manufacturer Bare Knuckle as smooth and bright in tone, with an EQ profile that shows strong treble and a bit of a scoop to the mids. Match that with a light and resonant body like this one and, in theory, you have a formula for something quite tasty.

IN USE

Before we get into the good stuff, of which there is a lot, a word about the fretboard, which feels a little bumpy. The reason for this is that Trent has adopted a conservative approach to both the rolling of the fretboard edges and the dressing of the fret ends themselves – and they're quite tall

Back in the saddle: the Trent wears a through-body six-saddle bridge

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £1,345 (inc hard case)
DESCRIPTION Six-string solidbody electric guitar, made in the UK
BUILD Obeche or poplar body, maple neck with 12" radius pau ferro fingerboard, dot inlays, 21 medium-tall frets and synthetic nut
HARDWARE Through-body bridge with bent-steel saddles, Kluson Deluxe tuners
ELECTRONICS 2x Bare Knuckle Old Guard P-90 pickups, master volume and tone, three-way pickup switch
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 42.7mm at nut, 51.4mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21.1mm at first fret, 22.3mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 34.5mm at nut, 54.5mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.1kg/6.8lb
FINISHES Ben's Blue (as reviewed), Harbour Blue, Fir Green, Broom Yellow, Safety Orange, Crowbar Red, Wafer Pink, Oyster White, Jet Black
LEFT-HANDERS Available on request
CONTACT trentguitars.com

Tone up: the guitar's simple controls have plenty of useful range

frets. Yes, we're being picky. But if you have the delicate hands of an apprentice rabbit-groomer, you'll be glad we mentioned this.

Now, where were we? That's right: light and resonant. The Trent Model 1's vibrant acoustic tone makes us wonder why obeche – most famously used by another British maker, Shergold (and briefly by PRS) – isn't a fixture of the boutique luthiery scene. Maybe it's the smell, which must be quite heady when it's raw. Anyway, once we've plugged in, that pleasing natural voice is translated into something perky and bright but sublimely balanced, with bags of that unique P-90 thrap in all three pickup positions.

It's no surprise given the voicing of these Bare Knuckles that the midrange is so fresh and open – what's perhaps most remarkable is the scale of the tonal differences between those three settings. The neck pickup boasts no shortage of pep in the top end but is beautifully full and smooth, the bridge unit sees much of that low-end content swiped away but replaces it with a supersized helping of twang and snap, and the middle position sits right between the two, bringing enough sweet cluckiness to draw jealous glances from nearby Rickenbackers.

All of this sounds almost as pretty through an overdriven amp as it does feeding a clean one. The Fender-derived elements of the Model 1's design ensure that things remain clear and breezy, while the P-90s keep everything solid. All in all, this Trent is a guitar that feels comfortable

Grain of truth: the Model 1 features a pau ferro fretboard

Pack a punch: Bare Knuckle Old Guard P-90s provide a mixture of power and bite

with a broader range of playing styles than most.

For confirmation of even further versatility, we must only look towards the volume and tone controls, two parts of any guitar that have a seemingly simple job but rarely do it quite as well as this. Either one of them, or indeed both, can be turned down as low as four without any loss of musicality. Instead, things simply get quieter and softer-edged, respectively, with the core character of the guitar remaining absolutely intact.

The neck pickup even does a nifty 'woman' tone – maybe it's time someone came up with a new name for that, eh? – with the second knob at zero.

We've seen more and more high-end builders across the Atlantic turning to a combination of Fender-style offset design and Gibson-style P-90 pickups. There's no doubt that this is a winning recipe for any guitarist willing to mix up their traditional ingredients. That British makers now seem to be getting on board with this approach is a welcome development… especially when the results are as delectable as this. ***G***

9/10 **Striking in style yet covering a wide range of likeable tones, this is a hugely promising debut**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Gordon Smith Gatsby **£1,299**
Harmony Standard Series Silhouette **£1,299**
Fender Player Mustang 90 **£629**

SIRE
LARRY CARLTON H7 & S7 FM

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

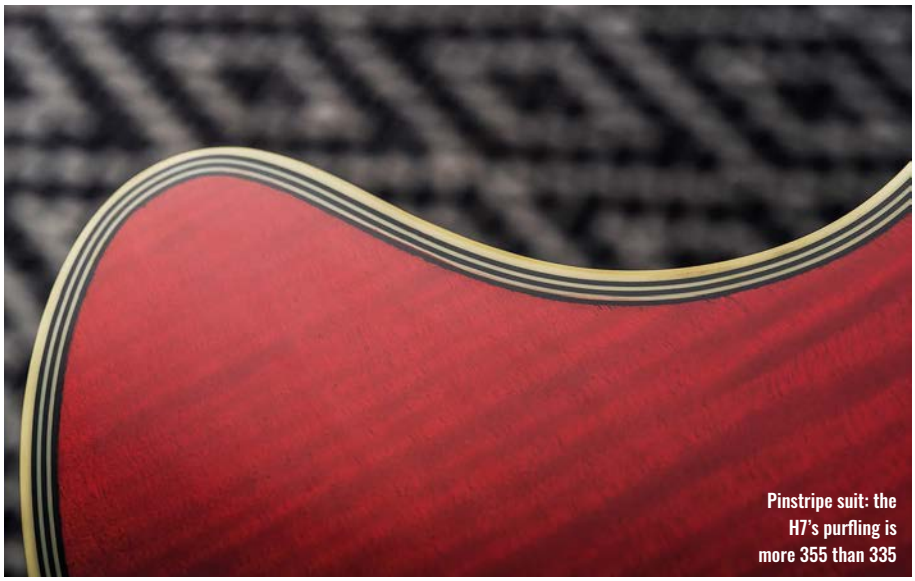
Mr 335 has put his name to a range of guitars that have nothing to do with Gibson but promise similarly high-class tones on a truly accessible budget. Has the session legend sired a hit?

There are two good reasons not to dismiss these guitars as just another pair of cheap Asian-made also-rans – and Larry Carlton's name isn't even the main one. Quite aside from sporting the signature of one of the industry's most well respected session guitarists, these instruments come from the same stable as the Marcus Miller basses, whose sound-per-pound quality has made them something of a phenomenon in the four-string world. Can Sire repeat the feat for six-string botherers?

Well, they could hardly have picked a better player to work with on this project. Carlton is arguably just as renowned for the purity of his tone as he is for the artfulness of his playing, which has featured on records by the likes of Joni Mitchell, Steely Dan, Michael Jackson and countless others since the early 1970s.

VOLUME
TONE

Heavy duty: the H7's humbuckers can kick out some thick tones



Pinstripe suit: the H7's purfling is more 355 than 335

His picture is all over the Sire website, as well as the boxes these guitars ship in. But, as with the Miller basses, this appears to be more than just a quick-buck marketing deal. The models we're testing – alongside a range of T-types, LP-types and acoustics – have been designed to Carlton's specifications, based on his own favourite instruments.

In the case of the H7, that basically means something close to an exact replica of his perfect Gibson ES-335 – or as close as you can get with an Indonesian-made guitar that costs little more than £500. The H7 is an all-maple semi-acoustic with a mahogany neck and ebony fretboard. It packs a pair of Sire's own vintage-style humbuckers, plus a complement of standard-looking hardware. That fretboard has a modern 12-inch radius and rolled edges, while the relatively generic headstock – the only bit of the guitar that's legally not allowed to look like a 335 – has a neat black veneer with Larry's signature running across the middle.

But there are a few other not-just-a-copy touches here too. The most obvious addition is the triple-pinstripe purfling on the body, an attribute borrowed from Gibson's more opulent ES-355 model. The f-holes are also bound and the frets have been fitted over the neck binding, meaning there are no nibs. All of this looks extremely smart, even if it isn't 100 per cent flawless in application.

Of course, Carlton doesn't just play semis – and that brings us to the S7 FM, which takes us into Superstrat territory. The body is alder with a flamed maple veneer, while the neck is roasted maple that's been lacquered to a shine on the 'board but sports a softer satin finish on the back.

Ahead of the curve: the S7 boasts faux binding around its S-type body

Player friendly: the sculpted neck join offers improved upper-fret access

The abalone dot markers don't always show up very well against the toffee-brown 'board but, again, the edges are rolled for a smoother feel in the fretting hand. There are only two controls – master volume and tone – while all the hardware, from the two-pivot vibrato bridge to the staggered locking tuners, is Sire's own.

Unlike the H7, the S7 FM isn't bound, except for a neatly understated strip of faux-binding around the body. Prefer your tops on the plain side? There's also a non-flame version of the S7 available in a wider range of colours – and it's £30 cheaper.

IN USE

The H7 is not a small guitar. Like the 1958 classic that provides its design template, it's wider than the average electric six-string, and the heavy maple centre-block of our review instrument coupled with its narrow but chunky neck brings the weight to almost 4kg. If you plan on doing Chuck Berry duck-walks with this thing, you'd better start working on those pecs.

One thing that's already plenty beefy is the sound of Sire's humbuckers. The neck unit is full and thumpy, a natural for shiny-shoed jazz. But the other two settings do an impressive job of keeping things full while dialling up the midrange snap too. There isn't a whole load of cluck in the middle position, which is bad news for clean indie pickers, but give the H7 just a teaspoon of overdrive and it reveals itself to be a rich and gutsy solo machine.

Our guitar arrived with virtually no relief in the neck but there aren't any problematic buzzes and the playing feel is pretty slick. Just be aware that this kind of tight but deep C profile isn't for everyone – and that, judging by the stains on our fingertips after five minutes of playing, the dark hue of the ebony may have been artificially enhanced.

Moving onto the S7 FM after that feels like exchanging a diving helmet for a baseball cap: as well as being lighter and more compact, the solidbody has a noticeably slimmer neck that technical widdlers will surely appreciate.

This time the factory action is higher but not enough to make playing this guitar a chore. The satin neck finish feels superb, the rolled fretboard edges really do make a difference, and the vibrato system has been well set up, with a natural response and decent tuning stability.

As with the H7, things get somewhat muffled with even the slightest dialling back of the volume control. Keep everything wide open on the S7, however, and it does exactly what you'd hope it would: deliver Strat-style tones that are clear and well balanced but backed by a satisfying bit of extra oomph from the humbucker.

Played clean, all three of the S7's pickups are perky and brisk, with plenty of phasey quack in both in-between positions. Did we say loads? We may have meant too much: if you're searching for that *Sweet Home Alabama* sound, you're almost better off using the middle pickup on its own.

Give it some mid-gain overdrive to play with, though, and this guitar really finds its genuine voice – and that's particularly true of the humbucker, which picks up right where the H7 left off by providing a Fender-flavoured variant of that same creamy fullness.

Even if we don't have the legendary Larry Carlton's playing chops, we can see why he was prepared to add his name to both of these guitars. Value is a little hard to quantify at a time when Mike Rutherford of Genesis is apparently happy to gig with a sub-£200 Squier Bullet Strat, but these Sires really do offer a lot of sonic sophistication for the money. **G**

KEY FEATURES

LARRY CARLTON H7
PRICE £529
DESCRIPTION Six-string semi-hollow electric guitar, made in Indonesia
BUILD Double-cutaway maple laminate body with maple centre-block, set mahogany neck with 12" radius bound ebony fingerboard, block inlays, 22 medium jumbo frets and bone nut
HARDWARE Tune-o-matic bridge with stop tailpiece, vintage-style tuners
ELECTRONICS 2x Larry Carlton Vintage Humbucker pickups, individual volume and tone controls, three-way pickup switch
SCALE LENGTH 24.75"/629mm
NECK WIDTH 40.2mm at nut, 51.7mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21.3mm at first fret, 24.6mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 32.5mm at nut, 52mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.9kg/8.7lb
FINISH Cherry Sunburst (as reviewed), Vintage Sunburst, See-Through Red, Black, White
LEFT-HANDERS None currently available
CONTACT andertons.co.uk, sire-usa.com

8/10 **A classy semi that's a bit of a handful but offers thick and buttery lead tones galore**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Epiphone Sheraton-II Pro **£599**
Ibanez Artcore AS93FM **£599**
Gretsch G5622 **£629**

KEY FEATURES

LARRY CARLTON S7 FM
PRICE £499
DESCRIPTION Six-string solidbody electric guitar, made in Indonesia
BUILD Double-cutaway alder body with flamed maple veneer, bolt-on roasted maple neck with 9.5" radius fingerboard, dot inlays, 22 medium jumbo frets and bone nut
HARDWARE Two-post vibrato bridge, staggered-height locking tuners
ELECTRONICS Sire Super-ST pickup set (bridge humbucker and 2x single-coils), master volume and tone, five-way pickup switch
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 42.2mm at nut, 52.2mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21.7mm at first fret, 22.7mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 34.5mm at nut, 54mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.7kg/8.1lb
FINISH Transparent Black (as reviewed), Transparent Blue, Natural
LEFT-HANDERS None currently available

8/10 **If you fancy a refined S-type with a humbucker at the bridge, this will do the job nicely**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Yamaha Pacifica 212VFM **£329**
Squier Classic Vibe '70s Stratocaster HSS **£389**
Sterling Cutlass CT50HSS **£629**

"Out of this world gift ideas!"
ERNIE BALL
THE PLAYER
GIFT GUIDE!
2021 Edition

GIBSON
GENERATION COLLECTION G-200 EC & G-WRITER EC

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

Two more acoustics equipped with Gibson's innovative Player Port, this time with a longer scale, a fancier appearance and added electronics

It's always the way, isn't it? You wait 120 years for Gibson to make an acoustic guitar with a shoulder-mounted soundhole and then four come along at once. Last time around, we explored two of these new models, the fully acoustic G-00 and G-45. Here, we're looking at the upper end of this nascent range with the G-200 EC and G-Writer EC, both of which apply the minimalist Generation Collection design language to existing Gibson models.

While the callipygian silhouette of Gibson's J-200 needs no introduction, the same cannot quite be said of the Songwriter model. This dreadnought outline – originally designed by Ren Ferguson – first emerged in the 1990s in the Gibson Custom Line series before becoming the Songbird and, eventually, the Songwriter.

The Generation Collection, made in Gibson's dedicated acoustic facility in Bozeman, Montana, is inspired by a recently discovered blueprint from the depths of the Gibson archives. Dating back to 1964, the 'Modern J-45' design featured a large circular soundhole in the lower bout, but never made it into production. Gibson has since done extensive research, the result of which is the Player Port, an elliptical plastic-edged soundport in the shoulder of the guitars that make up this range.

As with the other Generation Collection instruments, the Player Port also functions as a handy viewing window. Peaking through the port reveals not just the X-bracing and two tone bars but also internal construction that's a little rough-and-ready. That said, we loved the sonic impact that the Player Port had on the G-45 and the G-00 so it will be fun to see how well it works here.

The G-Writer and G-200 crank things up a notch in terms of both their functionality and their aesthetics. Each sports a Venetian cutaway alongside more elaborate bar inlays on its striped ebony fretboard, body binding and an LR Baggs Element Bronze pickup system. As with the other models in this range, the back and sides are made from figured walnut, the soundboards are Sitka spruce and the bodies are a little slimmer than usual.

The necks are made from utile – an African mahogany often referred to as sipo – carved to Gibson's Advanced Response profile, which in real terms is a slim and slinky C shape. The ebony 'boards and bridges of both guitars are well cut and the fretwork is uniformly smooth.

Window seat: the Player Ports allow you to peer into the guitars

On the button: the utile necks are set with hide glue and dovetail joints

IN USE

Unable to resist the call of the jumbo, we begin our playing session with the G-200. Here's the thing about the SJ-200 and its variants: despite its size, it's not by nature an excessively loud guitar. Instead, what you can expect is a rich sound by virtue of the size of the chamber but with a slightly ponderous response as the large soundboard flexes with each new attack. This has led collectors of vintage J-200s to refer to them as "whispering giants".

This G-200, however, doesn't so much whisper as growl. Perhaps it's the walnut back and sides, which often lend a more immediately musical response to factory-made acoustic guitars than maple does. Or maybe it's the slimmer body, the Player Port or the longer 25.5-inch scale length. It could be a combination of all these things and more. But ultimately what rises up here is a big sound with a faster attack that we're used to from typical jumbo acoustics.

There is a slight imbalance towards the low-end, however, meaning that bass notes within a chord will often last longer than the mids and trebles. This is particularly apparent in root six barre chords further up the neck. Open strings are loud and vibrant but once again there is a contrast with their fretted equivalents. It's subtle but discernible, especially when playing fingerstyle. Once you take a pick to the G-200, though, the clouds part and a chunky rhythm personality is revealed.

Earn your stripes: each guitar has a belly-down striped ebony bridge

Ring true: simple rosettes decorate the Sitka spruce tops

Set the bar: both guitars boast Gibson's G-Collection Single Bar inlays

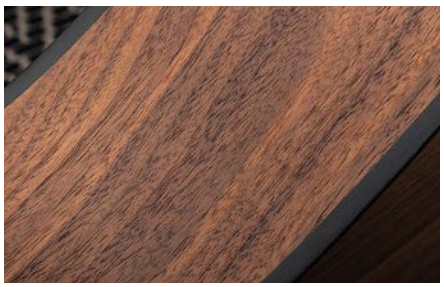
Rather like an orchestral gong, this works best when you warm it up a little.

Slipping into DADGAD is a smooth process – the well cut nut in combination with the Grover Mini Rotomatic tuners make sure of that. The extra sympathetic resonance of the octaves does make things a little mushy when playing intricate pieces but, conversely, it works very well indeed for slow airs and other expressive contexts.

This is still a very big guitar, though, and playing it seated for extended sessions might lead to fatigue in the right shoulder for shorter players. This is much less of an issue when playing standing, and an added advantage of this is that the guitar's lively back is effectively decoupled from the top when in full contact with your body, which calms down those rogue bass frequencies to some degree.

You don't call a guitar the Songwriter without being extremely confident in its capabilities as an instrument to serve the singer/guitarist. This instrument's ancestor, the CL model, was initially intended as a direct competitor to the Martin dreadnought that saw a resurgence in the 1990s due in no small part to the *MTV Unplugged* television series.

Despite the 25.5-inch scale length and square-shouldered body shape, the G-Writer feels and sounds very Gibson. There is a distinct sparkle to the treble strings in open chord sequences and, despite its intended purpose, it makes for a very capable bluegrass flatpicking machine.



Where it really excels, though, is with the gentle fingerstyle and expressive strumming typical of the Simon & Garfunkel meets Bon Iver school of modern folk balladry.

Once again, the application of altered tunings reveals new facets to the guitar's character. The G-Writer just loves C tunings, revelling in the depths of both Orkney and C sus4 while maintaining the same detail and articulation as in standard tuning.

While the LR Baggs pickup does sound convincing with a little EQ and reverb, these instruments are more susceptible to feedback than their non-Player Port equivalents. But fear not: a full range of accessories is planned for the Generation Collection, including a few feedback-busting devices optimised for stage use. Bring it on! *G*

KEY FEATURES

G-200 EC
PRICE £1,799 (inc gigbag)
DESCRIPTION 6-string acoustic guitar, made in the USA
BUILD Solid walnut back and sides, solid Sitka spruce soundboard, utile dovetail-jointed neck set with hide glue, striped ebony fingerboard and bridge, Tusq nut and saddle
HARDWARE Grover Mini Rotomatic chrome-plated tuners, two strap buttons
ELECTRONICS LR Baggs Element Bronze pickup system with soundhole-mounted volume control
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 43.8mm at nut, 53.8mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21.1mm at first fret, 23.5mm at 9th fret
STRING SPACING 37.8mm at nut, 56.9mm at bridge
WEIGHT 2.15kg/4.7lb
LEFT-HANDERS No
FINISH Satin nitrocellulose
CONTACT gibson.com

8/10 **This contemporary take on the J-200 offers a big sound from a big guitar, at least from the player's point of view**

KEY FEATURES

G-WRITER EC
PRICE £1,449 (inc gigbag)
DESCRIPTION 6-string acoustic guitar, made in the USA
BUILD Solid walnut back and sides, solid Sitka spruce soundboard, utile dovetail-jointed neck set with hide glue, striped ebony fingerboard and bridge, Tusq nut and saddle
HARDWARE Grover Mini Rotomatic chrome-plated tuners, two strap buttons
ELECTRONICS LR Baggs Element Bronze pickup system with soundhole-mounted volume control
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 43.8mm at nut, 53.8mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21.1mm at first fret, 23.5mm at 9th fret
STRING SPACING 37.8mm at nut, 56.9mm at bridge
WEIGHT 2.1kg/4.6lb
LEFT-HANDERS No
FINISH Satin nitrocellulose

8/10 **A versatile and inspiring instrument well suited to the soloist as much as the balladeer**

LIKE THESE? TRY THESE...

Sigma SGJA-SG200 **£1,249**, Eastman E20SS **£1,679**, Lowden O-23 **£3,299**

OUR GENERATION

Kinga Głyk plays **Swing Bass 66** nickel wound strings:
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BLACKSTAR

DEPT. 10 BOOST, DUAL DRIVE & DUAL DISTORTION

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

Pedalboard amp, guitar recording interface, distortion pedal, virtual speaker simulation suite, gig-saver… is there no end to the potential of Blackstar's new stompbox line? We plug into the latest slices of innovation from Northampton's finest to find out

Although world-renowned for delivering high-quality amplifiers used by such diverse luminaries as Jared James Nichols, Gus G, Neal Schon and Richard Hawley, the Blackstar design team are no strangers to the pedal scene either. The Northampton company's tube-loaded HT units were groundbreaking back in 2007 but now it's time to meet the next generation of Blackstar stompboxes: the Dept. 10 Boost, Dual Drive and Dual Distortion.

Named after Blackstar's in-house department responsible for 'blue-sky innovation', each of the Dept. 10 units boasts at its heart a single ECC83 triode running at more than 200 volts, along with a dizzying array of chunky control knobs and switches on the Dual models. The larger units also feature Blackstar's new Cab Rig speaker simulator technology, which offers over 250 mic and cab combinations, a choice of mic type and axis, room mics and master EQ for each of the virtual cabinets.

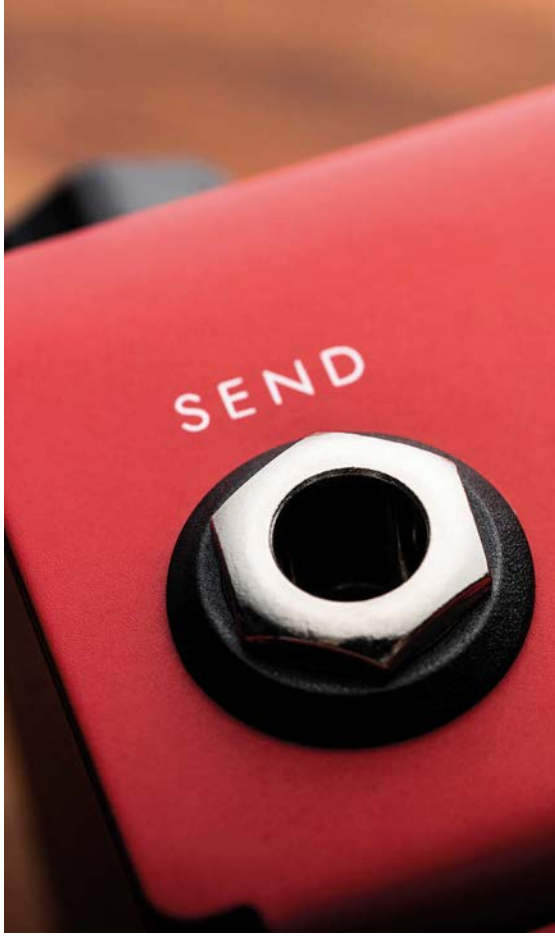
With deep editing carried out via USB, each of the Dual pedals allows you to store three onboard Cab Rig presets, accessible via a mini-toggle on the front of the unit.

Unlike some other valve-driven pedals that require bulky power supplies in order to function – and indeed their power-hungry HT forebears – each of this trio of tubular belles runs from a supplied nine-volt DC adaptor, which will be hugely appreciated when it comes to pedalboard integration.

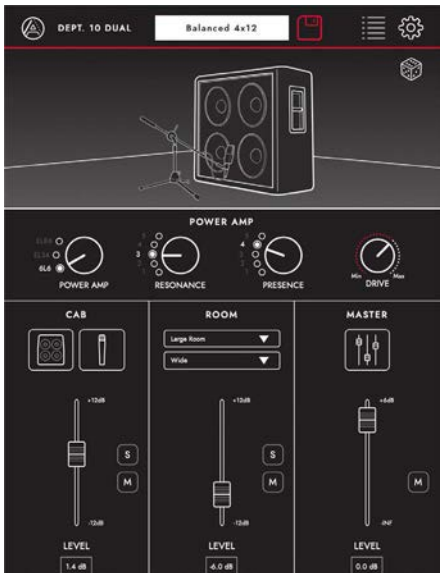
IN USE

By far the simplest and most affordable stompbox in the Dept. 10 range, the Boost combines a Class A gain stage with passive James-Baxandall-style EQ. In practice, this means that the dead-centre position provides unadulterated clean boost, while deviation from that point will either cut or boost the low and high frequencies. The boost knob itself governs the amount of sting you apply to your amp and, with up to 25dB on tap here, there

Get punchy: the smallest unit of the trio delivers up to 25dB of boost



Behind bars: each pedal's ECC83 tube is protected by a roll bar



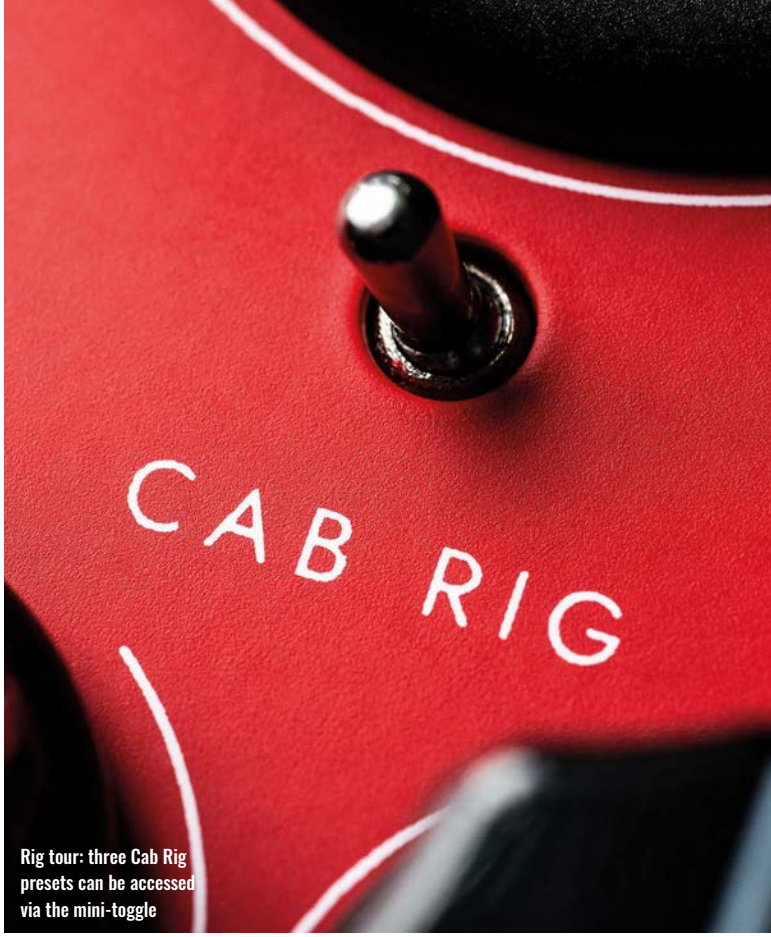
is certainly more than enough grunt with which to either push yourpedals harder at the start of your chain or to levitate your solos into the realms of unfettered melodic communication.

If you're boost-minded, then this little beast without a doubt deserves your immediate attention. However, while it pains us to skim over such a good pedal, we're keen to get as in-depth as possible with its Dual siblings – and there's a lot to get stuck into.

Both Dept 10. Dual pedals offer twin channels in an angled, double-width chassis. Each channel features level and gain knobs, and a mini-toggle switch with two voices of increasing grit. There is a master three-band EQ section, while Blackstar's patented ISF (Infinite Shape Feature) provides a rolling continuum between British and American voicings. These knobs are gathered around a friendly ECC83 tube, which pokes its head out of the top of the pedal and is protected from your rhinestone Crocs by a stout little roll bar. Just below that is the aforementioned Cab Rig toggle.

Both pedals come festooned with ins and outs: there's an effects loop, USB out, XLR line out, a standard output jack and a separate Cab Rig/headphone out. Whether you plan to use one of these units as a home practice or recording rig, a pedalboard amp direct into the PA or a good old-fashioned dirtbox in front of your amplifier, the Dept. 10 Dual units have all the connectivity you are likely to need.

Blackstar's Architect software is free to download and is the gateway to controlling many of the more advanced features of the company's products – and here, it's all about Cab Rig. Once connected to a MacBook Pro via USB and selected in Logic, Cab Rig's elegant monochrome GUI provides an



Rig tour: three Cab Rig presets can be accessed via the mini-toggle

Get connected: deep editing of speaker sims is possible via USB

experience close to that of industry standard recording solutions such as Universal Audio's OX. But what we're talking about here isn't impulse responses. According to Blackstar, Cab Rig "overcomes the shortcomings of IR 'snapshots' and uses state-of-the-art digital processing to reproduce the sound and feel of a mic'd up guitar cab in incredible detail".

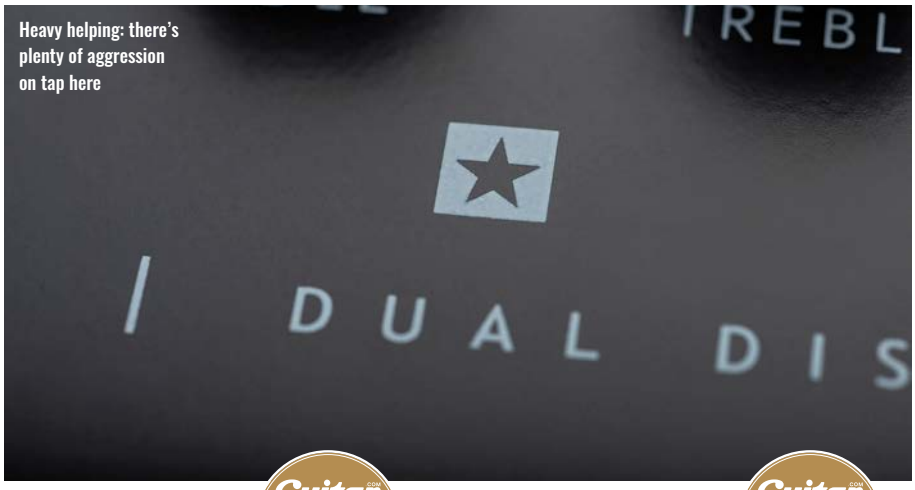
Cab Rig's latency-free simulations cover a massive amount of ground, from a simple DI and 10-inch combos to 4x12 cabinets with a choice of closed or open backs and alternative speakers. The organic goodness of the ECC83 can also be tweaked to mimic the voice of a 6L6, EL34 or EL84 power amp with separate resonance, presence and drive controls. As if that wasn't enough, the microphone models, room simulations and master EQ allow for further detailed tone-shaping. Sophisticated stuff indeed.

Of course, if you simply want to use the Dual units as standalone pedals in front of your amp, they'll do an excellent job – in this case, pushing our Cornford Hurricane gleefully towards saturation. Both pedals offer a clean voice on channel one, which works as an efficient boost. But things truly get exciting when you dial in the filth. The Dual Overdrive brings out some excellent low-gain and classic rock sounds, while the Dual Distortion takes us firmly into fire-breathing territory. It's the sort of relentless heavy aggression that has us wondering whether chalking a protective pentacle on the floor might not be a bad idea. Maybe next time.

However, it's in conjunction with the Cab Rig software that these pedals really shine. Anyone who has dedicated time to the sometimes frustrating art of recording electric guitars should find the latency-free response and immediately useable sounds a welcome relief. Yes, there may be potential for option paralysis as you scroll through the menus auditioning sounds but if you start off with a target timbre in mind, it'll be a quick and simple process.

As well as offering a remarkable amount of flexibility for the price point, the virtual playing experience here is very convincing. Not only do these pedals deliver an organic valve sound but they also respond to touch and dynamics in ways that many plugins simply can't. Compared with dedicated guitar recording software, the Dual pedals perform very well indeed, the distorted sounds in particular coming across with impressive vitality and power.

What could be a potentially arduous process of finding a solid core sound before fine-tuning it within Cab Rig is engaging here, and the UX is well thought out. If we were to judge these pedals purely on their potential as standalone units, they would certainly score well. The functionality offered by Cab Rig, however, takes them to another level entirely. As an all-rounder, the Dual Drive is our pick of the bunch. For just £249, it's one of the best examples of a no-brainer guitar gear purchase in recent times.



Heavy helping: there's plenty of aggression on tap here

KEY FEATURES

DEPT 10. BOOST
PRICE £159
DESCRIPTION Valve boost pedal, made in China
CONTROLS Boost, low, high
FEATURES 1x ECC83 triode valve, 9v DC mains power
DIMENSIONS 108 x 74 x 68mm
CONTACT blackstaramps.com

8/10 **A superlative little boost that brings authentic tube power to the table with its ECC83 triode**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

MXR Micro Amp Plus **£119**
Greuter Audio Fokus **£169**
Audio Kitchen The Small Trees **£319**

Guitar.com EDITOR'S CHOICE

KEY FEATURES

DEPT 10. DUAL DRIVE
PRICE £249
DESCRIPTION Twin-channel valve overdrive pedal, made in China
CONTROLS Gain 1, level 1, channel 1 voice switch, bass, middle, treble, ISF, gain 2, level 2, channel 2 voice switch. 3-way Cab Rig mini-toggle
CONNECTIONS Instrument input, effects send/return, USB, XLR line out, instrument output, Cab Rig output
FEATURES 1x ECC83 triode valve, 9V 500mA DC mains power, Cab Rig speaker emulation
DIMENSIONS 118 x 74 x 149mm

9/10 **Capable of supreme versatility and some fantastic chewy amp tones in conjunction with the Cab Rig emulation**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

EarthQuaker Devices Palisades **£219**
Strymon Iridium **£379**
Line 6 HX Stomp **£469**

Guitar.com EDITOR'S CHOICE

KEY FEATURES

DEPT 10. DUAL DISTORTION
PRICE £249
DESCRIPTION Twin-channel valve distortion pedal, made in China
CONTROLS Gain 1, level 1, channel 1 voice switch, bass, middle, treble, ISF, gain 2, level 2, channel 2 voice switch. 3-way Cab Rig mini-toggle
CONNECTIONS Instrument input, effects send/return, USB, XLR line out, instrument output, Cab Rig output
FEATURES 1x ECC83 triode valve, 9V 500mA DC mains power, Cab Rig speaker emulation
DIMENSIONS 118 x 74 x 149mm

9/10 **Need heavy? Here it is! The aggressive tones here translate into powerful recordings**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Wampler Dual Fusion **£249**
Empress Heavy **£289**
Neural DSP Quad Cortex **£1,599**

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GREUTER AUDIO
FOKUS

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

Guitar.com EDITOR'S CHOICE

Does the world need another boutique boost pedal? When it's as good as this Swiss-made stompbox, the answer is yes

Switzerland's Greuter Audio, a one-man operation based in Zürich, first came to our attention with the one-two punch of the Vibe and the Moonlight, a beautiful Uni-vibe clone and an elegant low-gain fuzz, respectively. The latest Greuter unit to hit our review board is the Fokus, a hand-wired clean boost that promises 20dB of transparent power, plus strong EQ capabilities.

Boost pedals have seen a dramatic surge in popularity in recent years. But with just about any pedal with a volume knob able to offer an extra shot of oomph, what is it that makes the boutique clean boost such an attractive option for modern players?

Firstly, not all boost pedal are created equal. Many cheap, mass-produced units will do a fine job of proving that degradation is cumulative by adding extraneous noise to your boosted signal while simultaneously sucking much of the life out of your sound when switched off. Greuter avoids this sort of thing with the use of the highest quality components and hand-wired construction.

Secondly, it is all too common for cheaper pedals to change the character of your guitar sound the moment you kick it in. Yes, you may be louder. But the thrill has gone, as your sound is now unrecognisable. To soften the potential for artistic angst, the Fokus offers +/- 15dB cut/boost across the bass and treble, with each bandwidth governed by a dedicated knob. Nice.

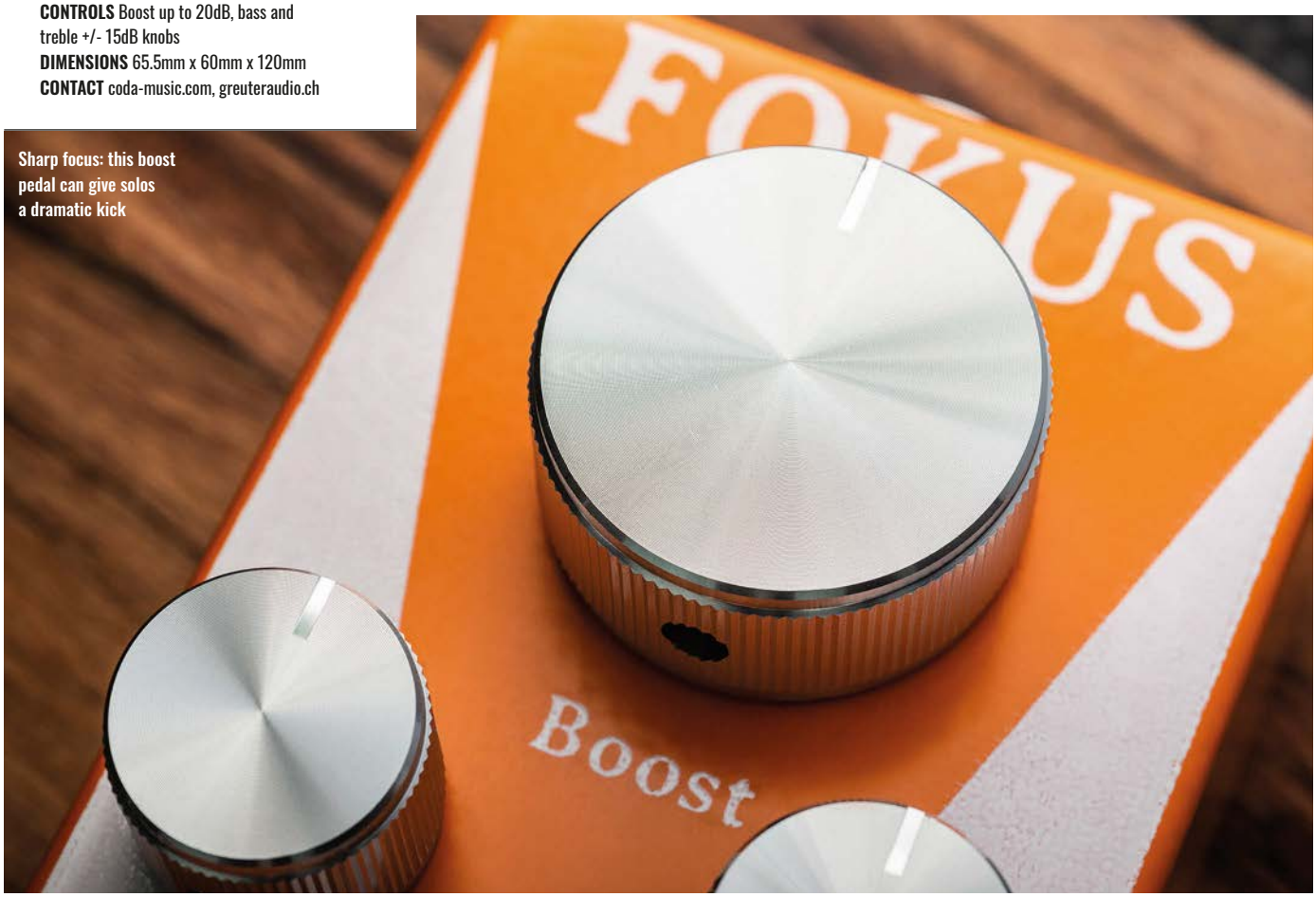
IN USE

Where you place your boost pedal will depend predominantly on individual taste,

Divide and conquer: the Fokus has independent bass and treble controls

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £169
DESCRIPTION Clean boost pedal, made in Switzerland, 9V DC mains power only
CONTROLS Boost up to 20dB, bass and treble +/- 15dB knobs
DIMENSIONS 65.5mm x 60mm x 120mm
CONTACT coda-music.com, greuteraudio.ch



Sharp focus: this boost pedal can give solos a dramatic kick

but the most common locations are at either the start or end of your effects chain. The former approach will push your whole chain, adding extra gain to overdrive and distortion pedals, whereas putting a boost at the end of your chain leads to a more dramatic rise in volume – the very thing to get a solo through the mix or drag some extra grunt out of a recalcitrant tube amp. Dutifully, we try both.

With the Fokus at the start of a chain that includes a Vemuram Jan Ray overdrive, a Phil Robinson Silicon Phuzz, and a Wren And Cuff Box Of War fuzz, we're swiftly reminded of the joys of careful gain-staging. With the pedals set at a relatively low gain, we're able to make them scream with the Fokus – it's a little like having another channel for your amp. Very handy.

That 20dB is a meaningful amount of boost to have at the end of your signal chain and with a grin we apply it to our amp, with trouser-flapping results. Yes, that should get you through any mix but, more importantly, the sound is rich in harmonics and detail. This encourages a considered approach to note choice and hand position, which in turn can help you play more expressively.

If you're in the market for a boost, you'll no doubt know that there are already a lot of options. But if you want one of the best out there, we can highly recommend the Greuter Fokus. *G*

9/10 **An extremely high-quality hand-wired transparent boost from an effects brand on the rise**

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SHOP TALK

COLLEEN FAZIO

Los Angeles amp tech Colleen Fazio is gleefully sharing analogue knowledge in the digital age – and earning an impressive number of followers in the process

WORDS DAVE HUNTER **PHOTOGRAPHY** MONIKA OLIVER

As we find ourselves thrust deep into the digital era, one hoary old amp dog after another has opined that we'll likely lose our understanding of analogue circuits entirely if the knowledge isn't handed down to the next generation. One problem though: "All of the electronics classes that are available in schools are really focused on digital. It would be so cool if there was a resurgence of analogue circuit classes in the future."

But that's not from your jaded old repairman down the back alley at Jimmy's Thermionic Valve & Radio Service. These are the words of Colleen Fazio, a diehard 26-year-old analogue nut at the heart of the next generation of point-to-pointers. An experienced amp builder and repairperson working amid one of the world's hottest music scenes, Fazio has 35,000 YouTube subscribers and commonly earns more than 125,000 views for her instructional videos. What, are there even that many people interested enough in guitar amp repair to watch a video on the subject? Apparently so – and we amp nuts should be grateful that there are.

STARTING WITH THE BASICS

Born and raised in Illinois, Colleen Fazio's fascination with the instrument began much like that of many kids: on the heels of an uncle who plays the thing.

"One of my uncles always had some guitars lying around his house," she says. "When I was little I always wanted to pick them up and try to play them, and he realised that I had an interest in music."

When Fazio was seven, her uncle bought her a small acoustic guitar for Christmas. Soon she was taking lessons and being drawn into the instrument.

"My first teacher was classically trained so I started with classical guitar and learnt how to read music and everything," she says. "I kept going until about middle school, when I was playing guitar in the jazz band for the sixth and seventh grade and then our bass player left to go to high school, so we needed a bass player.

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OFF

In jazz band, bass is way more important than guitar, so my teacher asked if I would want to switch to bass and I gave it a try. It kind of was a natural change for me; I enjoyed it. From that moment on, I primarily became a bass player. All the bands I was in during high school and after, I played the bass."

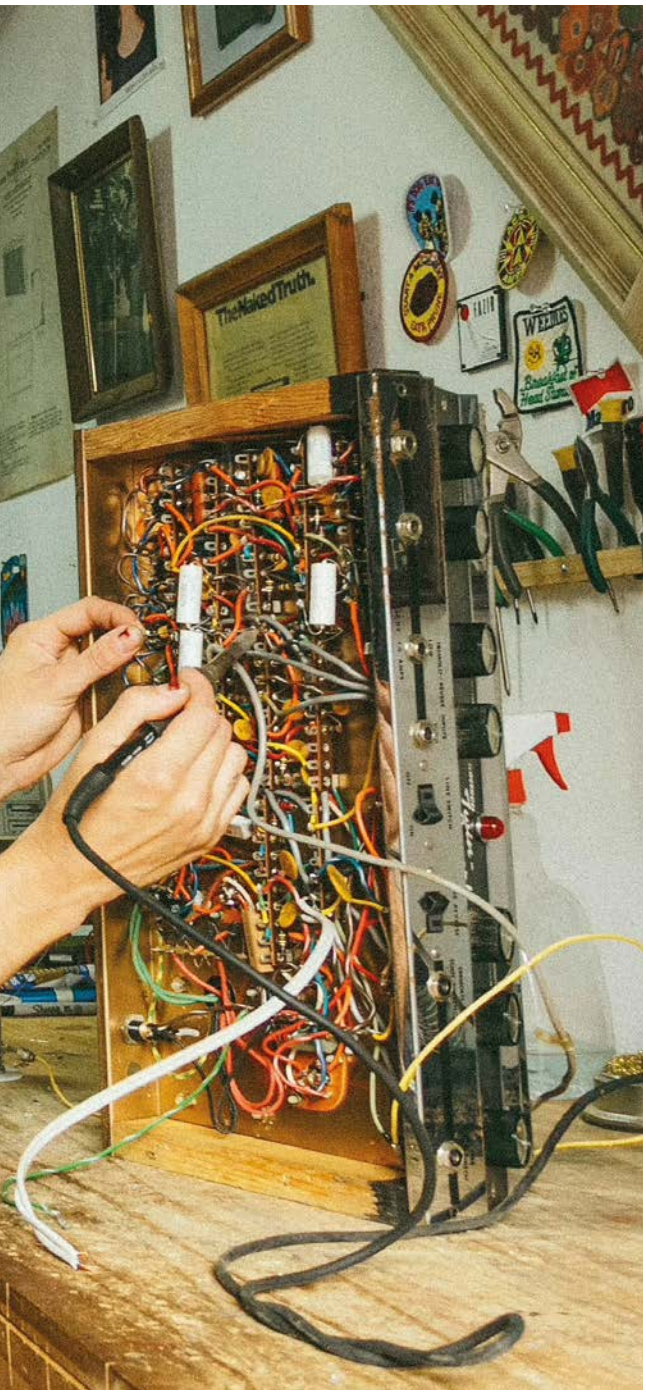
Fazio graduated from high school at 18 not entirely sure what she'd do with herself. She lived in Chicago for a time, playing in bands and following that path. Then, at about 19, she realised she was being inexorably drawn to the gear itself.

"I was interested in learning about either guitar tech'ing or amp tech'ing," she says, "so that's when I started exploring both. I ended up being drawn more into amps than I was into guitar tech work. Part of the reason was that my uncles had built amps before – they're the guys behind Vero amps. One of my uncles taught me how to solder and how to use basic tools like wire cutters. It was all a learning experience."

Once the amp bug took hold and Fazio had some experience under her belt – much of it gained at the Illinois repair shop Deltronics, under the tutelage of owner Mike Delvalle – she took her skills down to the West Coast to set up her own shop in the Los Angeles neighbourhood of Atwater Village.

Fazio tells us that the distinctive aesthetic of Vero amp models such as the Chicago Zephyr and the 20th Century Limited – among the more hardcore vintage-retro designs when they arrived on the boutique scene more than 20 years ago – has influenced her tastes as much as she's absorbed what she can of what went into making them. Having built several of her own amps for sale, she hopes to get back into the making and designing of them herself soon. For now, though, the tech work has been too demanding to allow much time for anything else.

"It's cool being in LA because there's so many musicians out here and a lot of people who collect,



so I'm really able to see amps that I've never seen in person. It really is the hub. That's pretty much why I came out here – just to be around as much gear as I possibly can."

MAKER'S MARK

Part of what Fazio has been enjoying is getting into the history of all those old amps that guitarists are still using out there in LA, many of which were manufactured by companies based just a stone's throw – or now a bumper-to-bumper commute – from her workshop in the northeast of the city.

"The first time I opened up a tweed Champ that was all original," Fazio says, "and I saw all the beautiful orange capacitors and everything that just looks old and kind of screams 'history' to me, it was amazing. I love thinking about all the things the amp has been through. The last time this amp was opened up the world was a completely different place, you know?

"BUILD A CHAMP KIT OR A DELUXE OR A BASSMAN. THAT'S A GREAT WAY TO LEARN HOW AMPS WORK, HOW THEY COLOUR TONE"

Colleen Fazio at work in her Los Angeles workshop

And now I open it up in 2021 and it's so different but the amp is still the same."

Stemming from that, Fazio has observed a new fondness among her generation for things you can touch, hold, feel – the concrete objects of value that present a physical counterpoint to the analogue and ephemeral that has come to dominate much of modern life. It's much the same attitude that has informed today's maker culture, and it has its offshoot in young guitarists who are discovering the value of otherwise archaic tube technology.

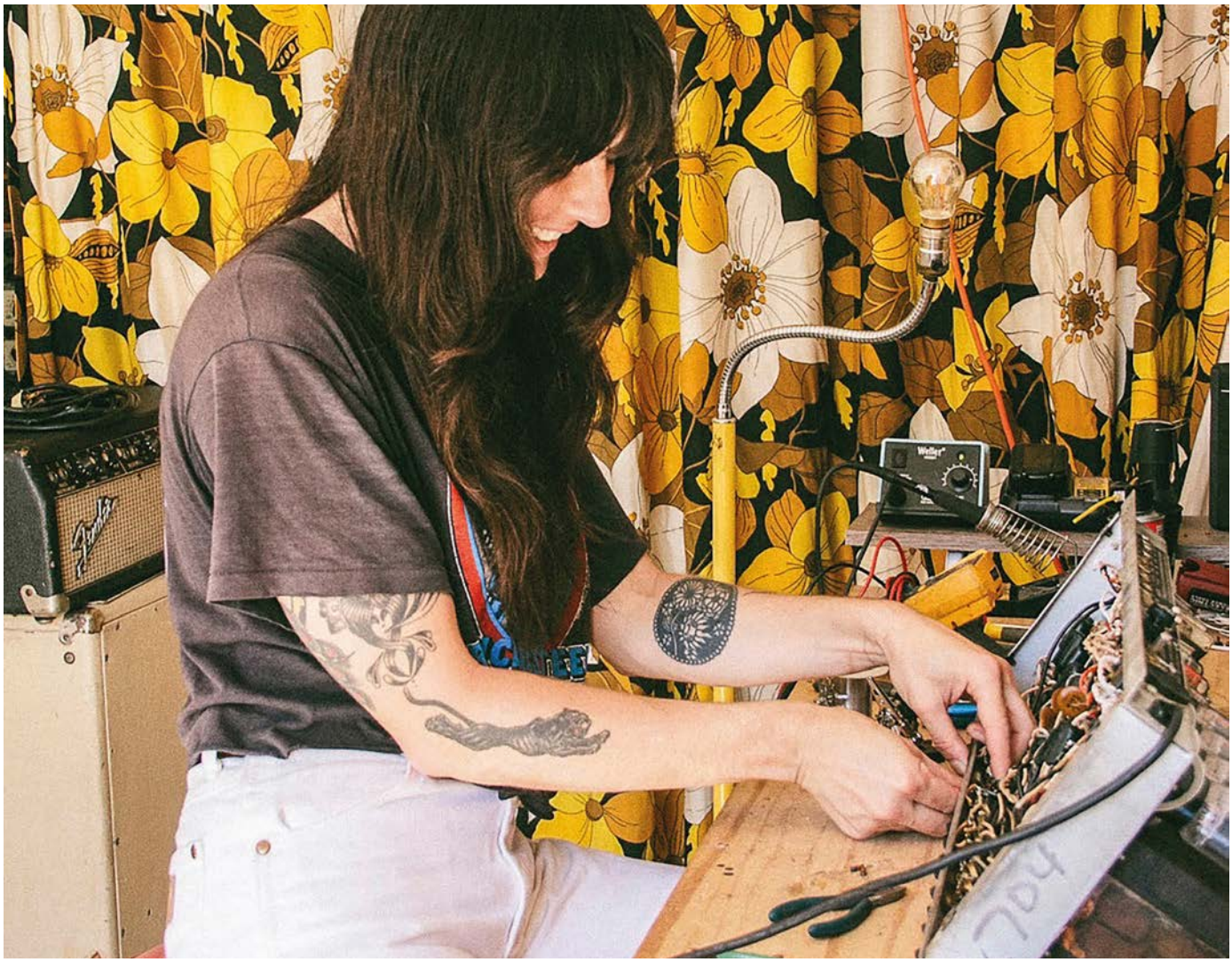
"I think a lot of builders, technicians, even a lot of players are learning more about what makes their amps work and what makes them reliable and so forth," Fazio says. "People definitely recognise that the mass-manufacturers are making amps very digital, amps that will probably be obsolete in 10, 15, 20 years because they just won't be fixable. So I think a lot of people are taking pride in building things that are going to last for 50, 60, 70 years, just like an old Fender amp. I think that is really important."

Fazio also credits online communities with stoking the embers and encouraging more young players to develop an interest in vintage equipment.

"In particular, there are a lot of podcasts and social media groups that are all focused on vintage amplifiers and vintage gear," she adds, "and people are wanting to learn more about them. And I think that's so cool because people are really going to take pride in having that kind of equipment."

Among the more fascinating jobs to come across Fazio's workbench have been an all-original, pristine late 1930s/early 1940s Gibson EH-185 combo, and an unusual Premier 76 resplendent in that model's mid-century aesthetic. But she also appreciates the value of the latter-day workhorses that continue to enable thousands of guitarists to simply get the job done, and is just as happy to help bring a late 1970s silverface Fender back to life as she is those rare gems.

"That era of Fender, I really like how they maintained the integrity with all hand-wired stuff," says Fazio. "They introduced a lot of cool features. Some of the later silverface Fenders have the boost switches or, even later in the 80s, they had the extra gain stages on the second channel, and all that stuff is really cool. And they did it in the Fender way, where it's as simple as possible but it still sounds very good. They started switching to PCB obviously in the later 80s or early 90s. But even their PCB amps, for the most part, are easy to work on and they're able to last for a while."



IT'S A JOURNEY

Fazio's own models have been met with success and she's eager to get back to that once her tech demands ease up. As with many small-shop builders, she started out reworking circuits based on classic Fender models. But her love of simplicity and willingness to make small changes to effect significant sonic gains has helped her bring more creativity to the venture.

"I always recommend to people interested in building: build a Champ kit or a Deluxe or a Bassman," she says. "That's a great way to learn how amps work and how they colour their tone and everything like that. My builds have branched off that. I've kind of coloured my preamp in a different way and I'm still in that R&D stage where I'm just figuring things out and deciding what I like. I love clean tones but I also love a bit of crunch, so I'd like to have a personal design that would offer both characteristics."

The most recent amp that Fazio built was a custom Silvertone clone for which she looked closely at the original builder's blueprint.

"Basically I just went off of the original Silvertone design," Fazio says. "I believe it was a 1484. I built it and made a couple of changes to the preamp to combine Fender and Silvertone characteristics to make it sound good to me. There's nothing wrong with going off those old designs that are tried and true. I mean, there are always ways to upgrade, and that's where the creativity comes in. It's a journey, for sure."

Rewind the scenario three decades, two decades, maybe even just one, and the headlines to Fazio's story would likely be about the unavoidable observation that she's a young woman working in what has traditionally been a field dominated by older men. But, as on so many other fronts, the times they are a-changin'.

"I'm very pleased to say it's mostly been that everybody's very respectful and encouraging," says Fazio. "I mean, every once in a while I'll get a misogynistic comment or whatever but it's fine – it's to be expected. But really everybody is so cool and so excited and encouraging, and I'm really thrilled with the community. Everybody's been really great and I'm very happy about that!"

So there's some hope yet for humankind, perhaps. And maybe – as tangential as it might seem – Colleen Fazio's enthusiastic reception among the ranks of solder-sniffers is some small sign that we really are getting somewhere on the gender-equality front.

"I think so," she says. "I think it's more common to come across a woman doing what was traditionally a male-dominated thing, and it's more accepted that it's just normal. I think it's all about awareness, and everybody's just kind of doing their thing, and it's great. And there are more women in the technical side of the music industry starting to come up, which is really cool and exciting." ***G***

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DIY WORKSHOP

HOW TO RE-CARVE A NECK PROFILE

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY HUW PRICE

Do you have a guitar that you love but the neck isn't right for you? Rather than changing the instrument, consider changing the neck profile instead

The subject of this instalment of DIY Workshop is a 1981 Tokai ES-100R. It's in excellent condition, it sounds fantastic and it plays very nicely. So what's the catch? The owner is finding the neck profile tough to cope with but, rather than ditch the guitar altogether, we've decided that I'll reprofile the neck.

With its rounded ears, elongated pickguard and substantial neck, the Tokai seems to have been modelled after a 1958 ES-335. Although it's not especially deep, the flat-sided U profile makes it feel formidable. Too formidable for its owner. However, this guitar is but a shoulder shave away from perfection, so here I'm stripping off the neck finish and reshaping it.

DEPTH GAUGE

Since the Tokai is an unknown quantity, there's no way to gauge how deeply the truss rod is set into the neck. If it's set very deep, any attempt to reduce the neck depth dramatically may expose it, turning a neck finessing project into a more troublesome neck replacement project.

A super-skinny early 1960s-style profile is therefore too risky. Instead, I need to measure the Tokai's neck depth so I can compare its profile with necks of a similar depth. For that, I use digital callipers with a spacer so that I can leave the strings in place. My spacer is a Switchcraft switch nut and is precisely 5mm deep. I re-zero the callipers to allow for the spacer's thickness, then place the spacer between the D and G strings and take readings for neck depth at the first, seventh and 12th frets.

MAKING TEMPLATES

Making a profile template from any guitar neck requires measuring callipers, a set of radius gauges and a profile gauge. You'll be surprised how cheaply you can buy these – almost certainly less than £30/$40 for the lot. You'll also need a pencil, a ruler and some paper.

I draw an upright line onto the paper and a second line at right angles towards the top of the upright. Starting with fret one, I use the callipers to measure the fretboard

1 A selection of tools you'll need for template-making and neck-reshaping

2 Using this switch nut as a spacer allows you to measure the neck depth without removing the strings

3 Width measurements are also taken at the first, seventh and 12th frets using digital callipers

4 This profile gauge produces surprisingly accurate results. Be sure to protect the neck finish and not to mix up the bass and treble sides

5 Here's an example of some finished templates before they're cut out with a craft knife

width at that point, and then transfer that measurement onto the perpendicular line, with the upright line dead centre.

Having determined the fretboard radius using my gauges, I place the appropriate gauge onto the paper, line it up with the width marks and draw the fretboard curve onto the paper to join the width marks up. Measuring from the top of the curve, I mark the neck depth onto the upright line using the measurements I took earlier.

Before using the profile gauge, I apply low-tack masking tape to the back of the neck to protect the finish from the gauge's metal pins. It also highlights the area I'm measuring as I press the gauge down onto the neck. The pins conform to the curve of the neck and, when lifted off, you can see its exact shape. Placing the gauge onto the paper, I align the bottom of the curve with the depth mark and use a pencil to transfer the profile from the gauge to the paper.

Using a craft knife, I cut across the perpendicular line and then cut along the profile line. With the first-fret template complete, I repeat the process for the seventh and 12th frets.

FUN FINISH

By wiping a small area with acetone and kitchen paper, I am able to establish that Tokai sprayed this guitar with nitrocellulose lacquer. The finish dissolves onto the paper,

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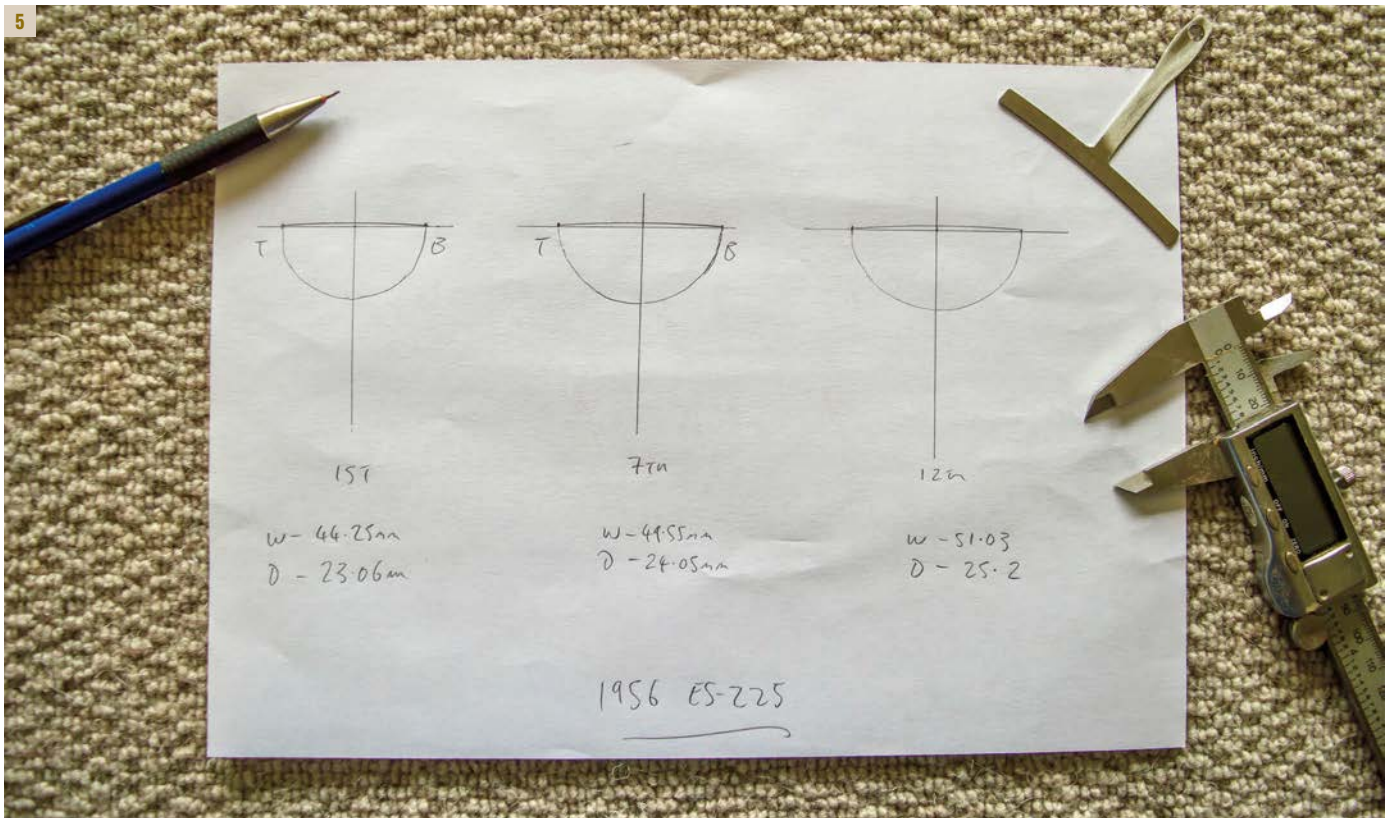

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but I'm left with a clear base coat that is impervious to acetone and industrial-strength stripper.

I don't know what this stuff is but I've encountered it many times before – often on guitars that supposedly have nitro finishes. I suspect it's a high-build coating that sands flat fairly easily and allows manufacturers to get away with using minimal qualities of expensive nitrocellulose lacquer.

After protecting the body and headstock, I wipe the nitro off the back of the neck. Rather than use a heat gun on the base coat, I scrape it from the playing area using utility-knife blades.

THE REPROFILE

I begin by drawing a guide line along the centre of the neck before using a rasp to reduce the depth to match the dimensions of an early 1960 Burst I previously took templates from. This leaves a flat area along the neck that I work back into the curve.

By holding up the templates against the neck, it's easy to see where wood needs to be removed. The areas with excess wood touch the templates and prevent them from sitting flat on the neck. I make pencil marks in the areas where I need to remove wood and then begin the reshaping.

You can use scrapers or a spoke shave for this but I prefer using a fine-toothed rasp and

6 The red lacquer wipes off with acetone to leave a very hard clear base coat that has to be scraped off

7 If you're using acetone or paint-stripper, you must protect the areas where you don't want to strip the finish

8 The finish is left on the fretboard binding and a thick line is drawn over it with a Sharpie, with high spots on the wood marked in pencil

9 The thin black line remaining on the binding shows that the curve now starts at the edge of the fretboard

utility knife blades. I find that a rasp removes material quite easily but, crucially, not too quickly. While working along the pencil lines, it's important to refer back to the templates regularly to check your progress.

Having addressed high spots in one area, you may find that the templates drop down to reveal other high spots. It's a process of continual refinement and best done slowly. You should also stop periodically to check how the neck feels in your hand.

Right now, the neck curve begins from the bottom of the fretboard binding. But for a 1950s feel, it should begin at the top edge. After masking off the wood, I draw over the binding with a Sharpie. The idea is to scrape away the bottom area to rid the binding of its squared sides. Once I'm left with a thin and uniform black line along the top edge, I know I'm done.

After reshaping, necks can feel a bit bumpy. Sanding lengthways isn't the best way to achieve a perfectly rounded feel; to bring them to a smooth curve, I place a long strip of 180-grit sandpaper across the neck and sand across the grain, like an old-fashioned shoe-shiner.

Once it feels smooth, I switch over to 240-grit and then 320-grit and sand lengthways. Once I'm happy, the owner comes over to sign-off on the refined profile. The neck feels far more like it was carved in late 1959 than 1958 and it's much nicer to play as a result. I still need to finish stripping the heel and headstock before I can refinish the neck but the toughest part is done. **G**

For more of Huw's work, visit huwpriceguitar.com

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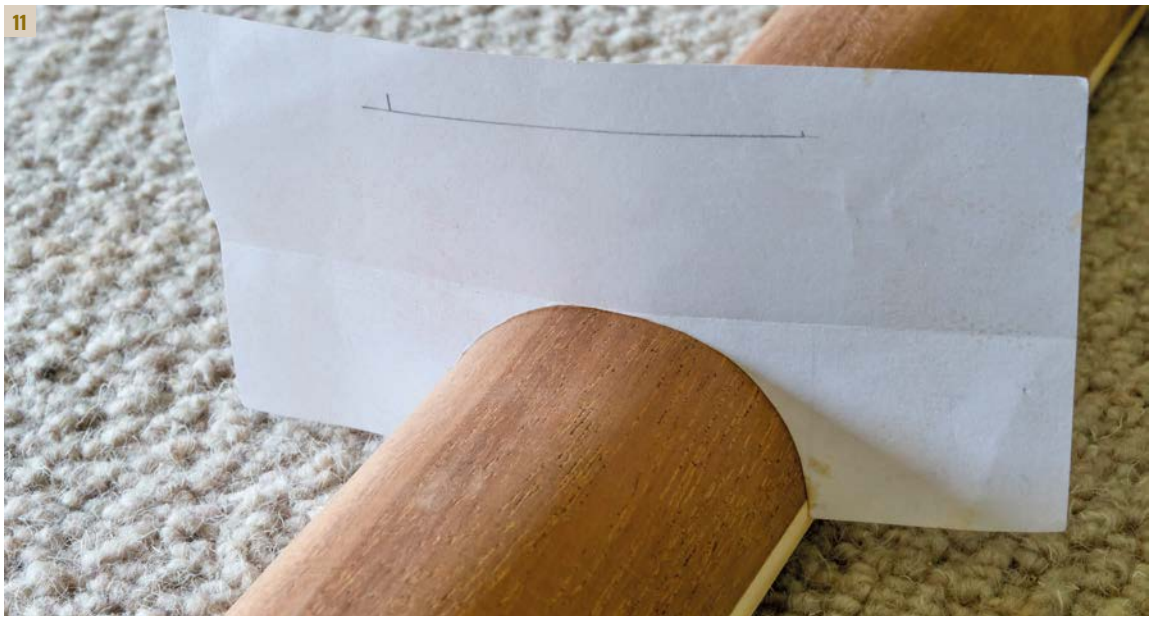

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10 This shoe-shine sanding method produces a smoothly rounded profile and removes any remaining bumps

11 The profile is checked against a template and is now an almost perfect copy of the neck of an early 1960 Burst

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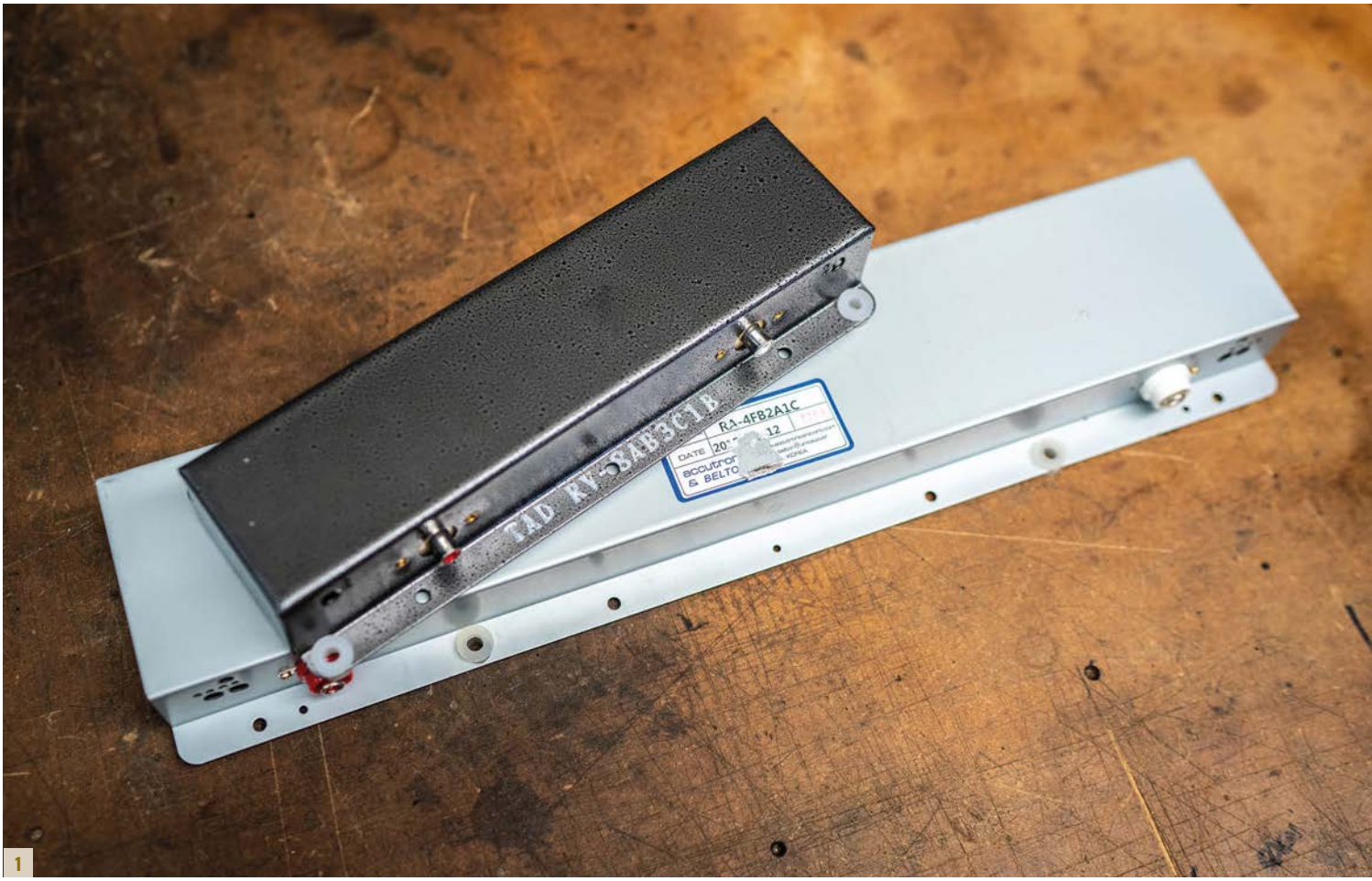
AMPLIFIER FAQ

Need a replacement reverb tank for your guitar amp but don't know where to start? Let Rift head honcho Chris Fantana be your guide

Have a burning question about your amp or, worse still, a burning amp? Email us at editors@guitar.com



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Hi, Chris. I need to order a replacement reverb tank for my amplifier. Can you tell me what the different numbers mean, and can I use any tank?
Anton, St Ives

Hi, Anton. Many thanks for your question in what will be the final printed instalment of my column. Don't worry though, I'll still be answering questions online at *Guitar.com*, so keep sending them in.

Just like speakers, reverb tanks have a number of different properties that the circuit is designed for, so you'll need to order a like-for-like replacement to ensure correct operation. Well, almost…

Here's a typical Fender reverb tank code: 4AB3C1B. Sadly, I know this one off by heart, as it's by far the most common tank used in guitar amplifiers. The seven-digit code is important. It tells us everything about it, from the size to the reverb length to the connector orientation. It even tells us which way to mount it in the cabinet.

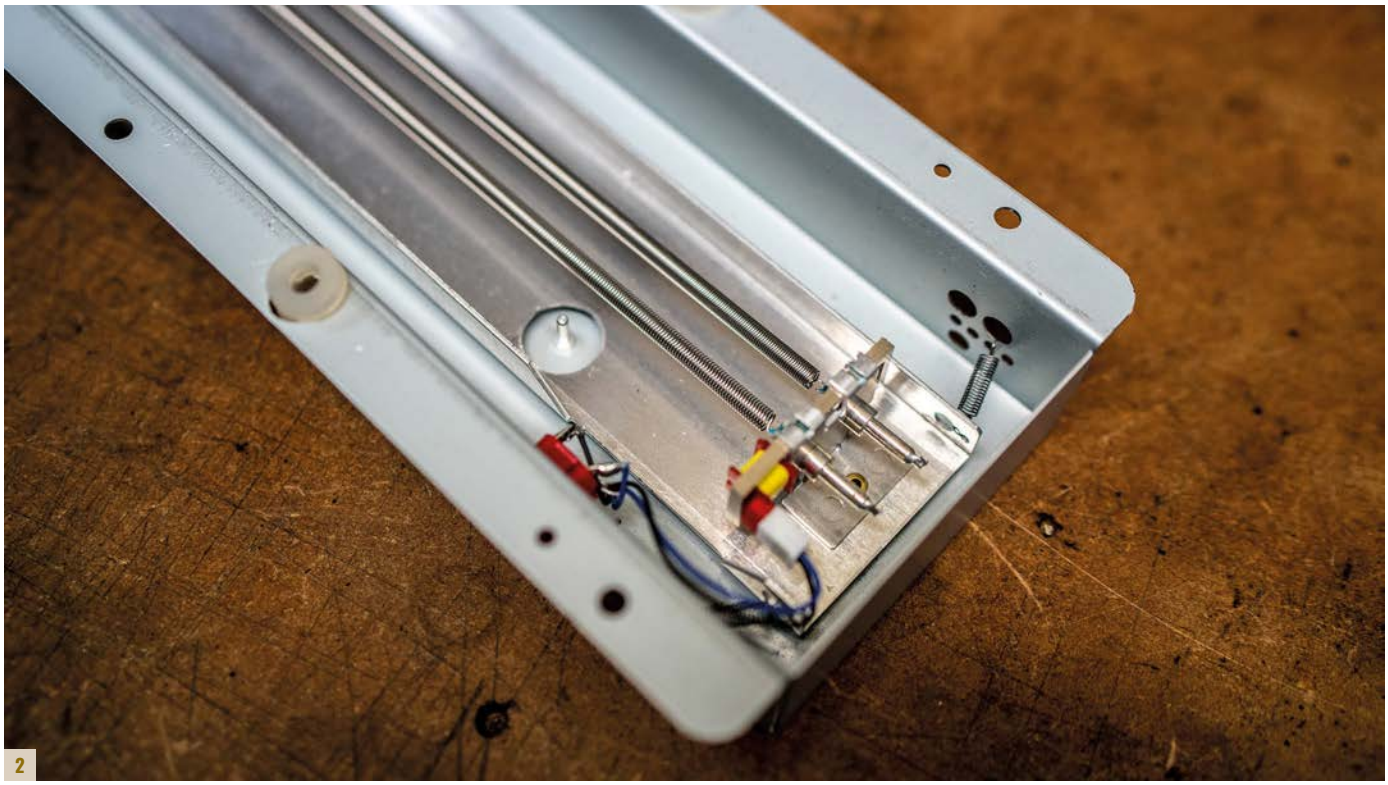
DIGIT 1: TANK TYPE

There are three different tanks available. Type 4 is 16.5 inches in length with four counter-wound springs in a 2x2 arrangement. Type 8 is 9.5 inches in length with three springs. Type 9 is 16.5 inches in length with six counter springs in a 3x2 arrangement. This is usually suited to keyboard and pedal steel. You might find a Type 1 tank. However these were discontinued and replaced by Type 8.

DIGIT 2: INPUT IMPEDANCE

This is matched to the output impedance of either the reverb transformer or driver valve/transistor.

A – 8 ohm
B – 150 ohm
C – 200 ohm
D – 250 ohm
E – 600 ohm
F – 1,475 ohm



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DIGIT 3: OUTPUT IMPEDANCE

This is matched to the input impedance of the recovery stage.

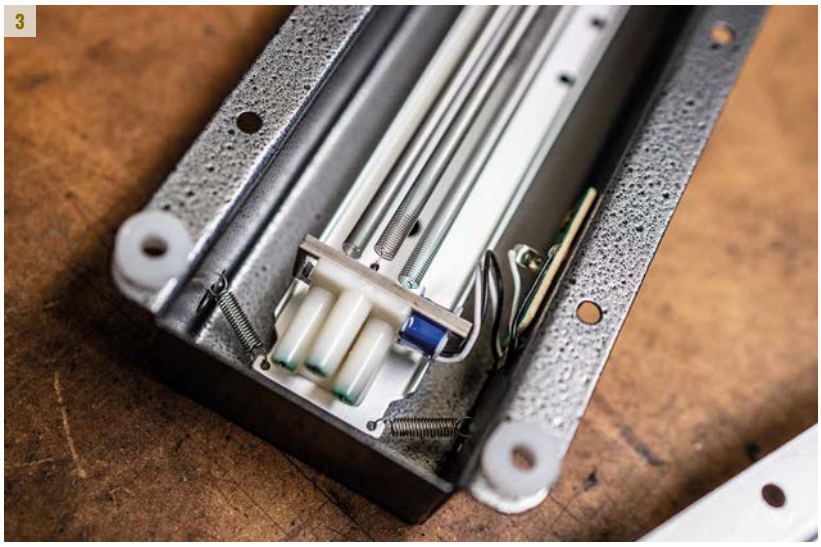
A – 500 ohm
B – 2,250 ohm
C – 10,000 ohm

DIGIT 4: DECAY TIME

This is the reverberation length. 1 is short, at 1.2-2 seconds. 2 is medium, at 1.75-3 seconds. 3 is long, at 2.75-4 seconds.

DIGIT 5: CONNECTORS

A: input grounded/output grounded. B: input grounded/output insulated. C: input insulated/output grounded. D: input insulated/output insulated. E: no outer channel.



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DIGIT 6: LOCKING DEVICES

Some tanks, such as those found in Fender's 6G15 standalone reverb unit, had a transportation lock to stop the springs bouncing around in transit. 1 means there's no lock, 2 means there's a lock.

DIGIT 7: MOUNTING PLANE

A: horizontal open-side up. B: horizontal open-side down. C: vertical connectors up. D: vertical connectors down. E: one end input up. F: one end output up.

How does this all work in practice? Let's take a look at the classic Fender tank 4AB3C1B. The code tell us it's a 16.5 inch 2x2 spring tank, designed to be mounted on the floor of a cabinet, with an insulated input and a long reverb time. The input impedance is eight ohms and the output is 2,250 ohms.

If you wanted to swap this for the smaller 9.5 inch tank, you'd order 8AB3C1B. Want the same size tank but with a shorter reverb time? Go for 4AB2C1B. Providing the input/output, mounting plane and connector configuration specs remain constant, you can swap between tank types and reverb times with no issues whatsoever.

Marshall typically used a different tank in its amplifiers. 4FB2A1C is a 16.5 inch tank with 1,475 ohm/2,250 ohm impedance, medium reverb length and insulated input, designed to mount on the side of the cabinet with the connectors facing upwards (although usually found facing down).

The Type 9 tank is interesting. If you're a huge fan of spring reverb, I recommend trying one of these in your amp. The space and depth is huge but you might suffer with some extra splashiness in certain circuits.

Replacement reverb tanks are cheap – about £30 here in the UK – and are a great way to tweak your amp's sound for very little outlay. Good luck!

Visit riftamps.com to see Rift's range of UK-built amps

1 Reverb tanks come in two main sizes, 16.5 inches and 9.5 inches

2 The Type 4 tank has four springs in 2x2 setup

3 The shorter Type 8 tank has three springs

CHORD CLINIC

F MAJOR

WORDS ROD FOGG

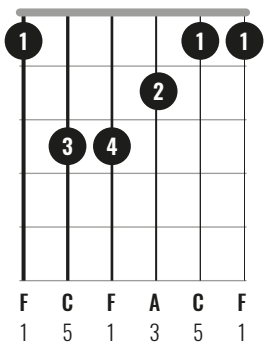
This month, we take on the challenging F major barre chord and come up with some useful alternatives and inversions

The basic F major barre chord is often the first barre chord that beginners come up against, as F is chord IV in the popular key of C major. It's tough to play – not only because it's a barre chord but because of its position at the first fret, where the nut is holding up the strings that the fledgling guitarist is trying to hold down.

One way of avoiding that dreaded first-fret F barre chord is to use a capo. You could capo the third fret and play a D major shape, or the fifth fret and play a C major shape. You could also capo the first fret and play E but, in each case, all the other chords in the song will need to be adjusted to the new key.

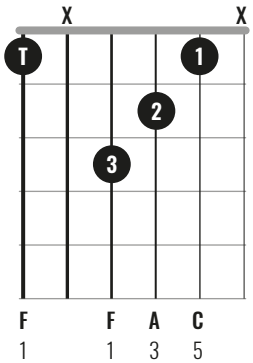
The notes of F major are F, A and C, the root, third and fifth of an F major scale. As you play these examples, see if you can find the major seventh (E) or minor seventh (E♭) to add to the chords, giving you an F major 7 or F7. Experiment with added notes and open strings and see what you find. Have fun – we'll see you on *Guitar.com* for more.

Figure 1: F



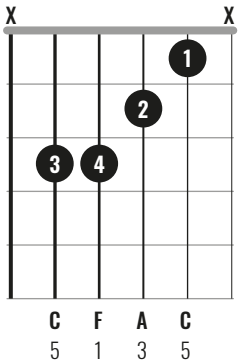
This is the big one, the F barre chord where the nut is fighting against you. We suggest practising this chord shape at the fifth fret, where it'll make an A major chord, and working your way back down fret by fret until you master it at the first. Be patient and try to get each note to sound cleanly.

Figure 2: F



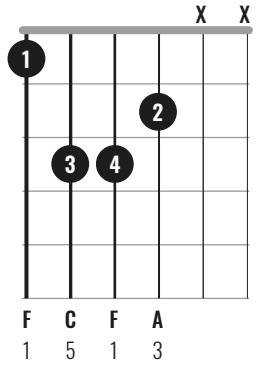
Here we have the thumb-over version of the F chord, which we like a lot. Not only is it more compact and better sounding but it avoids the barre altogether. On the downside, you have to mute the top E and the A string, and have hands big enough to reach the first fret on the low E with your thumb.

Figure 3: F/C



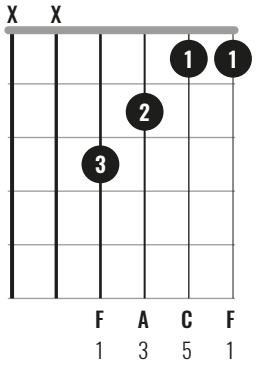
Technically a slash chord, F with a C bass, this version of F major is not as difficult to hold down. You'll need to mute both E strings, with your first finger and third finger, respectively. This chord sounds particularly tasty when you alternate between C major and F major chords. Give it a try for yourself.

Figure 4: F



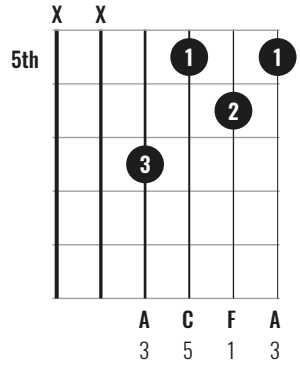
This one's not too tough to hold down either. This low voicing of F mutes the top E and B strings with the underside of the first finger, and sounds thick and chunky. If you release finger two and mute the G string as well, you'll have an F5 chord, containing just roots and the fifth – ideal for that metal opus you've been planning.

Figure 5: F



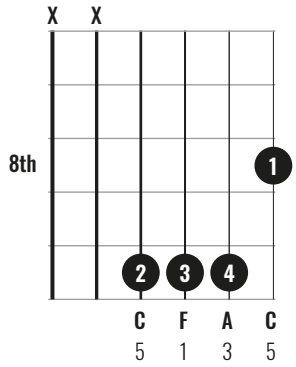
This one's a higher voicing of F major and is easier to play than figure 1 because you're only required to barre two strings with the first finger, as opposed to three. Mute the A string with the tip of finger three and you can strum freely. Just don't hit that low E. Try this chord shape up at the thirteenth fret too.

Figure 6: F/A



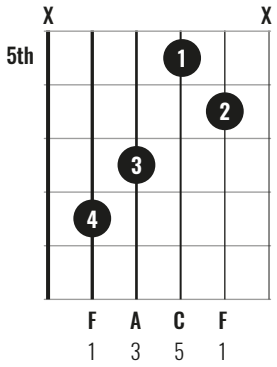
At the sixth fret you can find F major in its first inversion, which means the third of the chord, the A, is the bass note. First-inversion chords sound less focused and solid than root-position chords. Compare this one to figure 5, for example, and you'll hear what we mean.

Figure 7: F/C



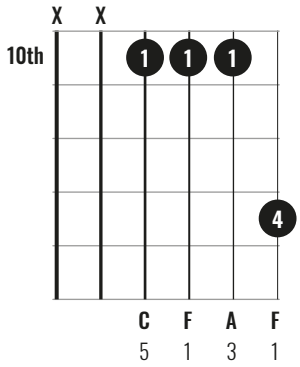
Here we have a second-inversion chord with C, the fifth, in the bass. Instead of using fingers two, three and four, try laying finger three flat across the middle of the 10th fret. Figures 5, 6 and 7 can be choppy, funky or played with arpeggios and give you some useful options if the music stays on F.

Figure 8: F



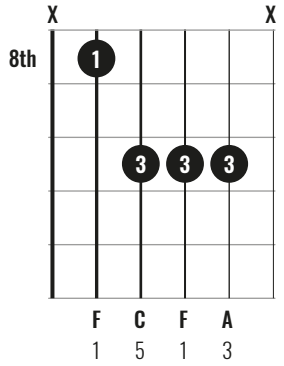
This shape has the same notes as figure 5 but shifted over to the middle four strings of the guitar. Try turning finger one into a half-barre to add the note A on the top string, as in figure 6. This one takes a bit of getting used to but it's a useful chord shape.

Figure 9: F/C



Here we have an alternative version of F/C, from figures 3 and 7, this time with the high F on the top string at the 13th fret. Lower this note one fret to E and you'll have Fmaj7. One fret more and E♭ will give you F7. Barre the top four strings at the 10th fret and you'll have F6.

Figure 10: F



This shape introduces the 'other' barre chord version of F major, with the barre coming from finger three. The tip of the index finger mutes the low E string. Remember, the great thing about barre chords is that they can be played at any fret. One fret down would be E major, then E♭ (or D♯) major and so on.

Rod Fogg is a London-based guitarist, teacher and writer. He is the author of *The Ultimate Guitar Course* (Race Point 2014), *The Electric Guitar Handbook* (Backbeat, 2009) and contributed to bestseller *The Totally Interactive Guitar Bible* (Jawbone Publishing, 2006). Find out more at rodfogg.com

TALKBOX

WORKING CLASS MUSIC

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

The guitar world isn't always welcoming to women and people of colour but Jason Mays and Tia Bailey, hosts of Working Class Music on YouTube, want to change that. We chat to Jason, who also plays guitar for the band Young Mountain, about partscasters, 90s anime and more

The moment it all started...

"Honestly, James Iha rocking that Jazzmaster on *Zero* and Tom Morello playing *Bulls On Parade* left a very heavy impression on me and kind of made me feel like, 'Hey there's more people like me, people of colour, doing that in modern rock – I can do that too!'"

I couldn't live without my...

"I go through so much damn gear. Logic would dictate my guitar but I'm going to cheat and say my partscaster Jazzmaster and the Mood by Chase Bliss Audio. That pedal has inspired so much out-of-the-box creative noodling that it's become a go-to for me when I'm just noodling around and trying to be creative."

The one that got away...

"Back in 2014 I was fortunate enough to get my hands on a 1964 ES-335, and I sold it to fund a move to California. To this day, it's the one that got away."

My signature model...

"Actually, I kind of already have one. It's my black Jazzmaster! It's got the pickups and wiring from an old '64 gifted to me by our sound guy, Xander. It has the neck from a TVL, the bridge and vibrato assembly are Mastery, and the body is a Squier FSR Classic Vibe. If I'm ever cool enough to get an official Fender signature model, it would just be that."

The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...

"It's definitely *not* the opening riff to *Stars* by HUM. It depends. I have a few chord progressions that I noodle around with but a go-to riff would either be *Unravel* by Björk, *Meet Me In Montauk* by Circa Survive or *Optimistic* by Radiohead."

The best advice I've ever been given...

"Never be disingenuous with yourself, your art and your audience. Music isn't a competition. Focus on being true to your craft and yourself. Don't worry about trends."

My Spinal Tap moment...

"My whole life is a walking Spinal Tap moment! The one that always comes to mind is getting lost in Boston 30 minutes before our [Young Mountain] set and ordering some wings to the Palladium just so I could ride with the delivery driver."

My guilty pleasure...

"Disney music and anime theme songs from the 1990s. Cue the soundtrack to *A Goofy Movie* or the *Vegeta* piano theme from *Dragon Ball Z*."

I wish I was there...

"Side stage for Jimi Hendrix at Woodstock!"

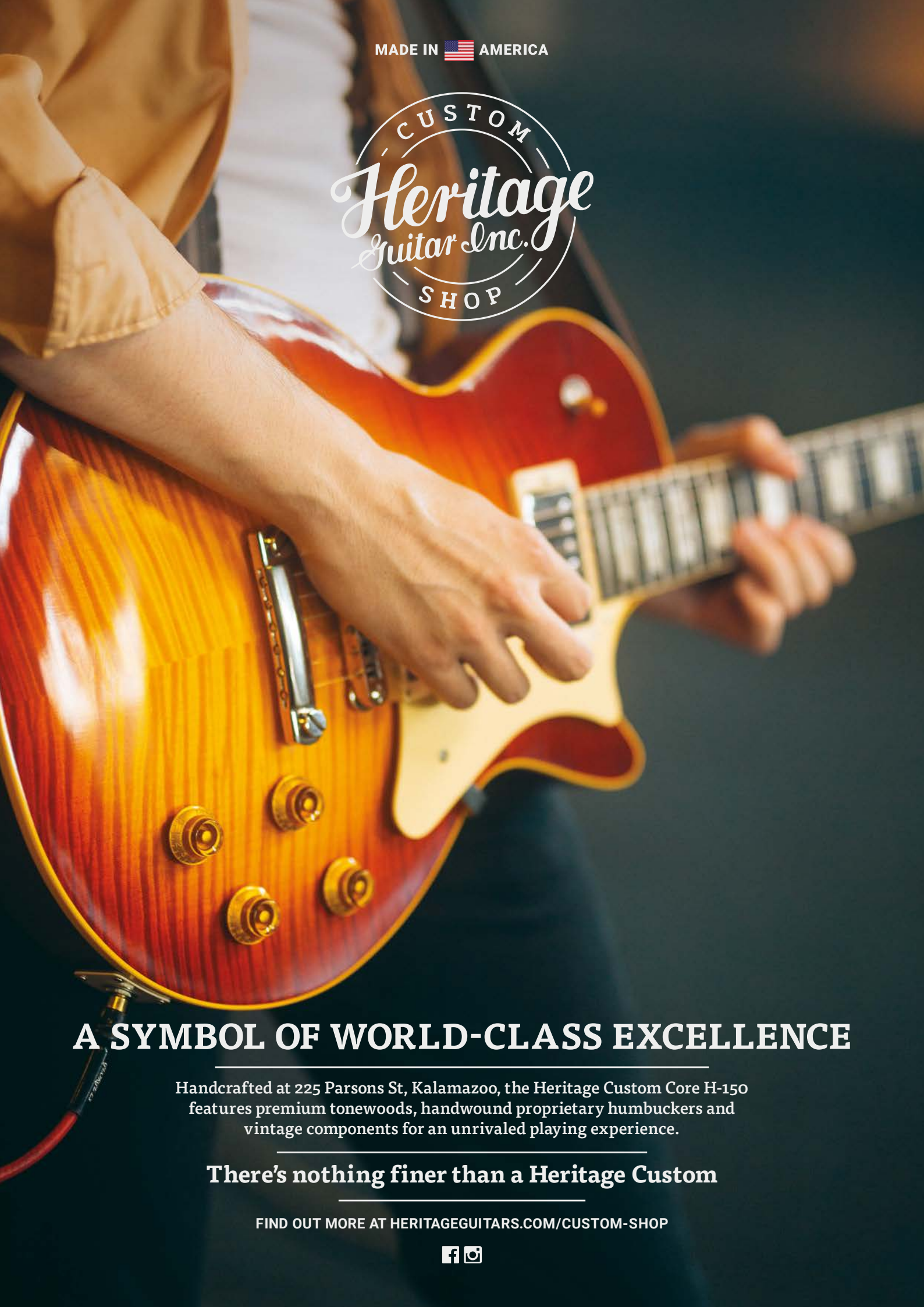
The first thing on my rider...

"Popeyes' spicy chicken combo and Bai Bubbles Bolivia Black Cherry sparkling water. Also, a crap-tonne of sour jellybeans. If you can't tell, I've put a lot of thought into this answer."

If I could just play one thing...

"Oddly enough, I'm not really a metal person. I'd love to be able to play heavier stuff at a proficient level but I'm happy with just being the weird indie/ambient/shoegaze guy." G

Visit youtube.com/WorkingClassMusic to check out the show. Young Mountain's debut EP, *If You Leave*, is out now.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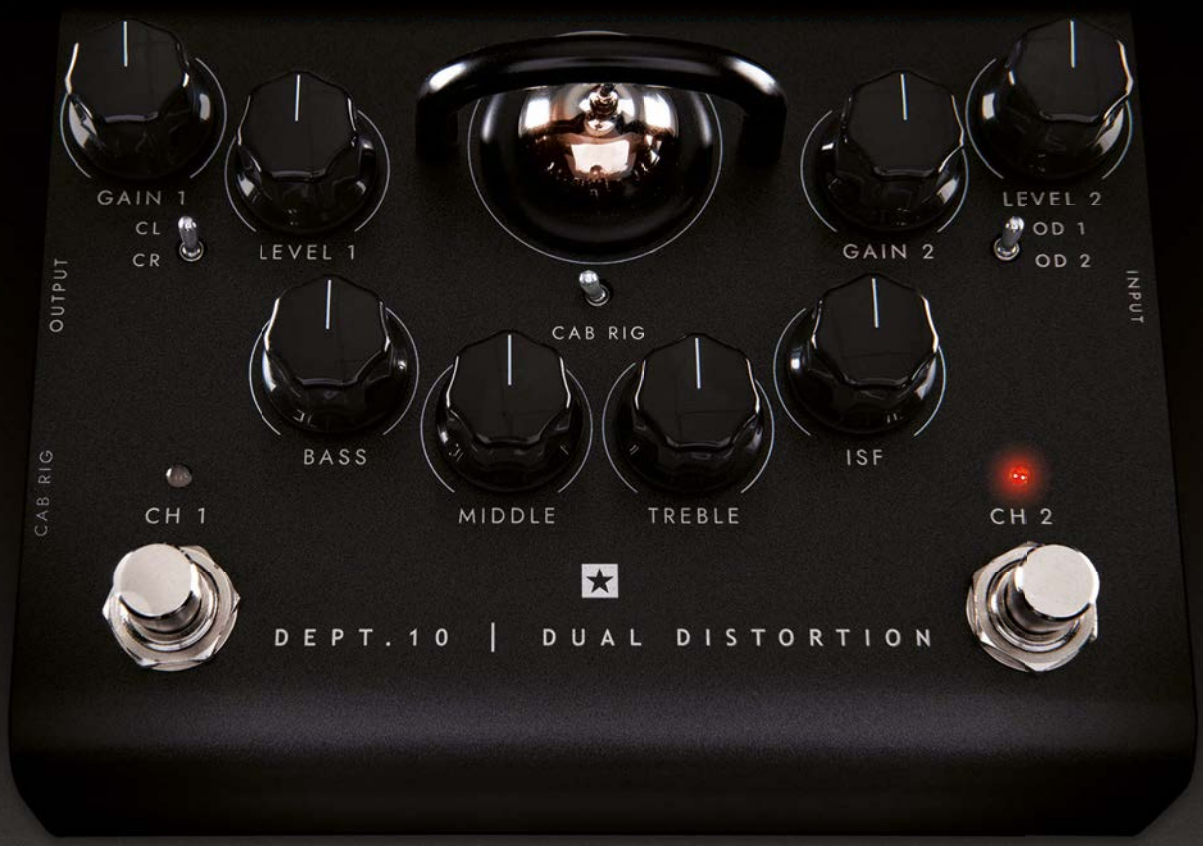

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